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Sonny

by
Maude Fulton

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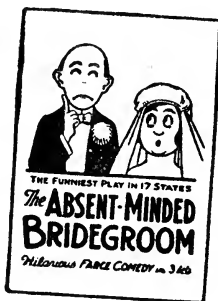


Farce-comedy in 3 acts, by LARRY E. JOHNSON; 6 m., 6 w. Time, 2¼ hrs. *Scene:* 1 interior. Princess Alma of Deleria, on a visit to the United States, outwits her scheming royal mamma and elopes with a young crown prince, thereby starting a chain of thrilling events. Uproariously funny. Production fee, fifteen dollars. Price, 50 Cents

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Price, 50 Cents

T.S. DENISON & COMPANY Publishers
623 South Wabash Ave. **CHICAGO**

SONNY

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A Comedy-Drama in Three Acts

By
MAUDE FULTON

Author of
"Enter Mary Jones"



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
Publishers

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Sonny

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SONNY

FOR FIVE MEN AND THREE WOMEN

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their first appearance)

FRANCELIA *Housemaid at the Christy ranch*

PINGREE TUCKER *An ex-marshal*

BUD WILLIAMS.....*Foreman of Christy ranch*

CAROLINE DODSON *Jacqueline's school teacher*

ROBERT McCORD.....Interested in real estate

HERRICK HELM *A writer*

JACQUELINE CHRISTY (SONNY)

.....*Mistress of the Christy ranch*

EL MALO *Leader of the outlaws*

TIME—*The present.*

PLACE—*Southern California, near the Mexican border.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About two and a quarter hours.*

SYNOPSIS OF ACTS

ACT I. Living room of the Christy ranch, two miles from Calo Calico, California, on the Mexican border. It is late in the afternoon.

ACT II. Same as in Act I. Midnight of the same day.

ACT III. Office of the Grand Commercial Hotel
in Calo Calico. Dawn of the next morning.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

FRANCELIA—A young Mexican girl of eighteen or nineteen, slender and pretty. She has a languid air except when an emergency calls for quick action, when she is alert and fearless. In Act I, she wears a white lace dress with high headdress, a gayly colored mantilla, and red shoes and stockings. Red roses are pinned on her dress and in her hair. Later in act, she changes to a dark blouse and skirt suitable for riding horseback, and a torn shawl, all showing signs of hard use. In Act III, she wears the same shabby costume, without the shawl.

TUCKER—A grizzled man of fifty with a quiet, quizzical air. Wears a worn business suit throughout the play.

BUD—A well-built man of thirty-two, with a face bronzed from the exposure of outdoor living. He is good-natured and apparently easy-going, but with a character forceful enough to master quickly any situation that arises. His whimsical humor cloaks a shrewdness that makes him hard to outwit. Throughout the play, he wears a soft dark shirt open at the throat, corduroy trousers thrust into high boots, and a leather jacket which he takes off in the house.

CAROLINE—A tall, plain-looking woman in her middle forties. She gives the impression of being thoroughly capable and resourceful, and is kindly in spite of her brusque manner. Throughout the play she wears a neat, rather severe dark dress with a coat and hat at her first entrances in Act I and Act III.

McCord—About twenty-eight years old. He is

sleek and well-groomed, and years of good living have given his figure a decided chubbiness. He is devoted to business and extremely fond of food. Wears a well-cut light suit throughout the play. Makes his first entrance wearing a light overcoat and hat.

HELM—About twenty-six, of slight build and dark complexion. He affects the mannerisms of the poet without making a caricature of the part. He pretends great enthusiasm for adventure, but his naturally timid nature causes him to go into a complete funk in the presence of danger. Throughout the play, he wears a suit of rather extreme style and fashionable accessories which suggest the dandy. Makes his first entrance wearing a light overcoat and hat.

SONNY—Aged twenty. In Act I she is wistful and appealing, very much the little girl in dress and manner. She is naturally plucky, but her evil nightmare has worn on her nerves until she is obsessed with the idea of being a coward. In Act III, she loses her fearfulness and becomes the spirited, self-reliant western girl. In Acts I and II, she wears a dark, girlish-looking dress suitable for traveling, and at her first entrance has on a light coat and a cap. In Act III, she appears in chaps with a black shirt, neckerchief, spurs, and battered old hat. A cartridge belt, with holster and gun, is around her waist.

EL MALO—Aged about fifty-five. He is a small, wiry American with white hair and a weatherbeaten face. His manner is in complete contrast with what one would expect to find in a bandit and outlaw. Wears an old dark shirt, corduroy trousers tucked into high boots, and a leather jacket.

PROPERTIES

ACTS I AND II

Large leather divan
Armchair
Library table with drawer
Four straight-backed chairs
Telephone table and chair
Telephone instrument
Fireplace with mantel
Pair of "longhorns" (hooks or pegs may be substituted)
Man's hat
Pair of spurs
Flask supposed to contain whisky
Whisk broom
Books
Indian water jug
Box of cigars
Magazines
Newspapers
Framed photograph of a girl
Guitar to be played off stage
Candle and candlestick
Navajo blanket
Bright-colored table scarf
Rugs
Curtains
Drapes
Pillows
Electrolier
Wall switch
Auto horn to sound off stage

Act III

Long hotel desk

Bench

Three small tables

Twelve kitchen chairs

Small stove

Picture of Mexican celebrity

Mexican flag

Picture of Lincoln

American flag

Case of pigeonholes

Several letters

Two or three hotel keys

Wooden strip with pegs

Hotel register

Writing paraphernalia

Kerosene bracket lamp with reflector

Table lamp (wired for electricity)

Santa Fé railroad map

Four or five men's hats

Small clock

Bottle supposed to contain brandy

Pictures cut from cheap magazines, advertising
calendars, etc.

Cocoanut shells for hoof beats off stage

For FRANCELIA—Glass of lemon soda, two empty
glasses.

For TUCKER—Cup of tea, pocket comb, gunny
sack of potatoes, bucket, two paring knives, tray
with glasses (with Bud), two earthenware bowls,
.44 revolver with blank cartridges.

For BUD—Handkerchief, tray with glasses (with
Tucker), deck of cards, watch.

For CAROLINE—Large hand bag containing box

of candy; suit case; tray of food, with plate, knife, fork, spoon, cup, and saucer.

For McCORD—Suit case, cocktail shaker, cup of coffee, large sandwich.

For HELM—Suit case.

For SONNY—Gun in holster.

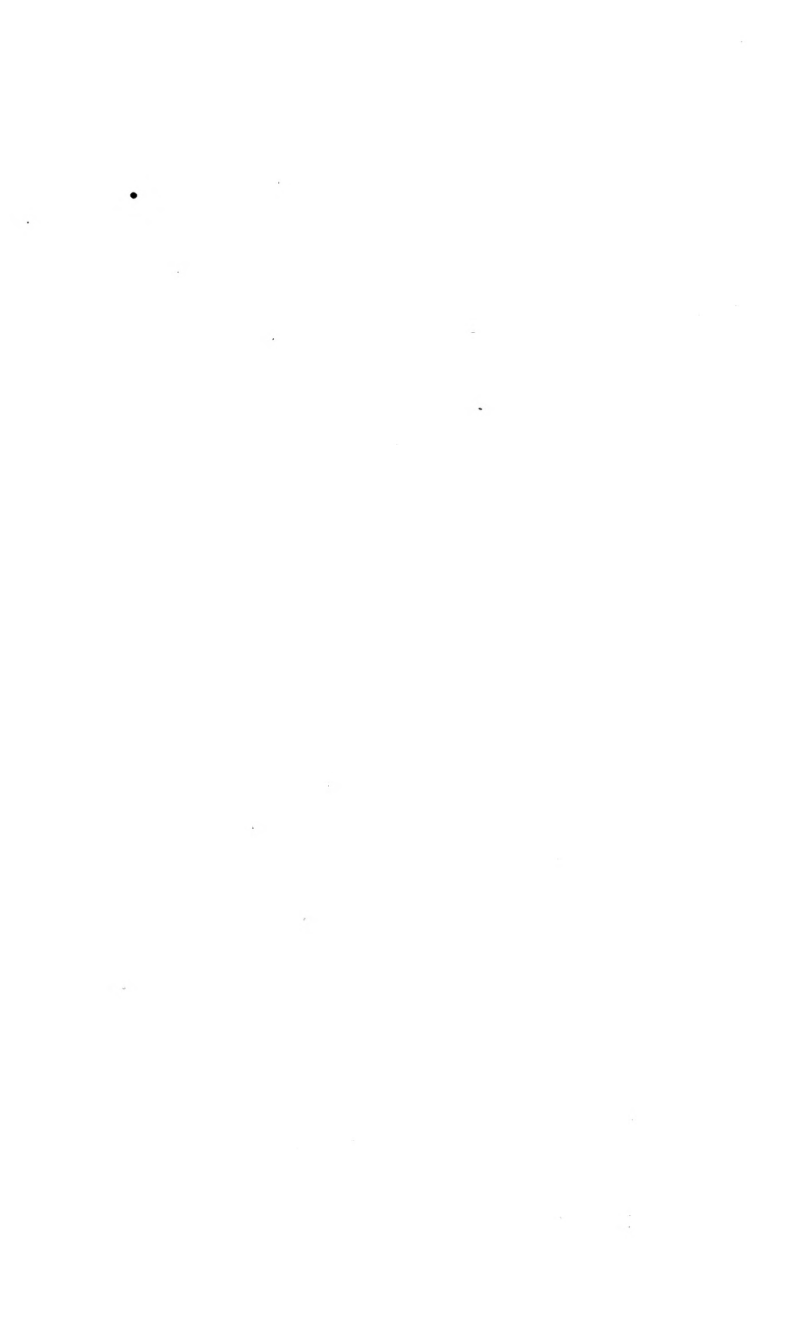
For EL MALO—Gun loaded with blank cartridges.

ACTS I AND II

ACT III

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Up stage means away from footlights; *down stage*, near footlights. In the use of *right* and *left*, the actor is supposed to be facing the audience.



SONNY

FIRST ACT

SCENE: *Living room of the Christy ranch near Calo Calico, California. It has five doors: one down left and a second up left, both leading to bedrooms; a third up right leading to a spare room, a fourth down right leading to the dining room and kitchen, and a fifth up center leading outdoors. The center door, which is raised two steps above the floor level, is supposedly of heavy wood and has iron brackets screwed to the frame, by means of which it can be barred from the inside. In the back drop, at right and left of the center door respectively, are two windows with wooden blinds or shutters. The room gives one the impression of mellowness and comfort. The furniture, the rugs, and the sparse draperies are in quiet good taste and are not new. In the middle of the right wall is a rough fireplace with a mantelshelf, on which are a few books, an Indian water jug, and a box of cigars. In front of the fireplace, partly facing the audience, is a huge leather divan draped carelessly with a bright-colored Navajo blanket. A little left of center is a table with three straight-backed chairs around it—one at right, another at left, and a third back of it facing the audience. There is a small telephone table just below door down left, with an instrument on it and a straight-backed chair beside it. An armchair is in the upper*

right-hand corner, and a straight-backed chair is down right, just a little below the door to the dining room. On the wall near the door down right is a pair of "longhorns" or ordinary hooks, on one of which hangs a man's hat, while a pair of spurs is nailed to the wall near by. The center table has a drawer in which there is a whisk broom, also a flask presumably containing whisky. On the table are a gayly colored drape, a pile of magazines, some newspapers, and the framed photograph of a girl. In the back drop at left of center door is a switch which controls the cluster of overhead electric lights at center of stage. It is late in the afternoon.

At rise of curtain, the door and the windows up center are open, and through them appears a flat, monotonous landscape, bare except for some rocky foothills in the distance. FRANCELIA is standing in the doorway up center, while a voice off stage, accompanied by a guitar, sings softly.

TUCKER enters, up center, coming from left. He pauses to look at FRANCELIA, crosses down right to look off right, then turns back to FRANCELIA.

TUCKER.
(*Quietly.*)

Francelia. (*She does not answer.*) Francelia!

FRANCELIA.
(*Turning to him.*)

Señor?

TUCKER.
(*Ironically.*)

What are you made up for?

FRANCELIA.

I go presently to the fiesta.

TUCKER.

And leave all the work?

FRANCELIA.

I do my work, señor. The boys ship all the cattle, then they go Viega City for beeg time. Get drunk; pass pleasant evening. I go to the fiesta. (*She bows as if to go.*) Excuse!

TUCKER.

Reckon you hadn't better go, Francelia.

FRANCELIA.

(*Firmly.*)

Si, señor. I must. It is most important.

TUCKER.

(*Suspiciously.*)

How important?

FRANCELIA.

I have borrow thees things for but one night. (*Indicates her clothes.*)

TUCKER.

I had no idea your affairs was so complicated. All right. Lope along. (*Seats himself on divan right and allows FRANCELIA to reach door before he speaks.*) Oh, Francelia! What do you hear about this here Mexican bandit, El Malo?

FRANCELIA.

(*Coming down, frightened.*)

He's very bad fellah, señor. He keel Ex-President Carillo and steal his army. Every place he go he

keel and steal. People most terrible afraid of him. It is why they call him El Malo. "El Malo" mean "bad man."

TUCKER.

Where is he now?

FRANCELIA.

I do not know, señor.

TUCKER.

I thought maybe you'd heard something from your friends over the border.

FRANCELIA.

(Plaintively.)

I have no friends. I am a Mexican.

TUCKER.

(Significantly.)

I'll be your friend if you come across.

FRANCELIA.

I like better stay in California.

TUCKER.

You know what I mean. In case you do hear anything about this bad man, you trot right to me with it. It'll be worth a little money to you.

FRANCELIA.

(Shrugging.)

I have already two dollar. It is enough.

Enter BUD WILLIAMS, up right, briskly.

BUD.

Francelia, you got to go to town for me pronto. Gosh! I wish I had a cup of coffee.

TUCKER.

There might be some tea in the kitchen. Could you swallow a cup of that?

BUD.

Might if I held my nose. Git me some; will you, Ping?

TUCKER.

What's up?

BUD.

(Excitedly.)

No need to git excited. Do as I tell you. *(Exit TUCKER, down right. FRANCELIA exits, up center, slowly and sulkily. BUD calls through the door to TUCKER.)* Tell Chong to kill a dozen or so chickens.

TUCKER.

(Calling from off down right.)

Chong ain't here.

BUD.

Holy gopher! Where's he gone to?

TUCKER.

(Calling from off down right.)

To the rodeo with the rest of the boys, I reckon.

He enters, down right, with a cup of tea, which he carries to table at left center.

TUCKER.

I'll git your supper for you.

BUD.

You can't cook for half a dozen people.

TUCKER.

Ain't that many people in town right now. Set down nice and pretty an' tell me about it.

BUD.

(Distractedly.)

Leavin' me flat now, of all times! What'll she think?

TUCKER.

She? Who?

BUD.

Sonny! She's due from the East on the six o'clock train.

TUCKER.

(Becoming as excited as BUD.)

No! Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? You're rattled; that's what you are! You'd ought to keep cool like me. *(Gets out a pocket comb and combs his hair.)* Have I got time to shave? When did you git word? Anybody goin' in to meet her?

BUD.

(Sipping the tea.)

When you're through stampedin' that way, I'll explain. First thing, the next train ain't likely to be in before eight o'clock, and the next thing is, what are we goin' to eat in place of supper?

TUCKER.

We'll cook supper our own selves. You ain't forgot how to make flapjacks.

BUD.

They ain't very stylish.

TUCKER.

Sonny won't care. We'll boil a few potatoes and open a can of peaches, and that'll make a right nice spread. I'll mill around in here and see what Chong left. (*Crosses and exit down right.*)

FRANCELIA *enters, up center.*

BUD.

Francelia, I want you to go to the Royal Oyster Parlor in town. They're piecin' together a couple quarts of ice cream for me. You hang around in Calico all ready, and the minute the sun goes down, you make a bee-line for home with it. (*He brushes his clothes and shoes with a whisk broom that he takes from the table drawer.*)

FRANCELIA.

(*Sulkily.*)

You make promise to geeve me a holiday thees night.

BUD.

Yes, but I didn't know then that Miss Christy was comin'.

FRANCELIA.

(*Brightening.*)

Mees Chreesty? A señorita?

BUD.

The señorita that owns this rancho. She arrive on tren *directo de la seis*. Ice cream *por ella*. *Sabe?*

FRANCELIA.

(*Beaming.*)

Si, señor! I fly! (Exit, down left, languidly.)

(BUD straightens out the magazines on the table, picks up a framed photo, smiles at it affectionately, and crosses to put it on mantelshelf.)

TUCKER, off stage, hums a sentimental popular air as he enters, down right, carrying a gunny sack of potatoes, a bucket, and two bowls and paring knives. He crosses to sit at right of table.

TUCKER.

How do you peel a potato, Bud? Around the edges or close to the bone?

BUD.

(*Drawing up a chair.*)

Oh, I give my knife plenty of rein and leave her go where she likes. Always strikes me there's somethin' kinda sad about a potato.

TUCKER.

Yeh. It's the only vegetable I know of that can't git stewed.

(*They peel the potatoes and throw them into the bucket.*)

BUD.

That ain't it. I figger every time I meet up with one that his home in the ground is goin' to be my home some day when I'm planted. Seems like I ought to be polite enough to look him in the eye in passin' and say, "Howdy, neighbor."

TUCKER.

Anybody comin' with Jack?

BUD.

Three of her playmates from school, her wire said. Little scamp! I bet by this time she's eight foot tall.

TUCKER.

Shucks! Two years ain't much! Is she feelin' better now? How did she come out with that doctor?

BUD.

(Gravelly.)

He don't seem to help her none.

TUCKER.

Does he know about—about the whole thing?

BUD.

Yeh. I wrote him. I told him I'd raised Sonny from a baby, and that this here nightmare she has that scares her plumb crazy ain't no nightmare a-tall but somethin' she seen with her own eyes when she was too little to understand. I told him he mustn't tell her that, though.

TUCKER.

Why not? You've been a damn fool not to tell her.

BUD.

(Painfully.)

I couldn't.

TUCKER.

(After a pause.)

How old is Sonny now?

BUD.

Twenty.

TUCKER.

Twenty! Is it seventeen years since her paw and maw died?

BUD.

Yeh! I'm afraid—

TUCKER.

What of?

BUD.

I'm afraid Sonny'll begin to think of gettin' married pretty soon now.

TUCKER.

Likely.

BUD.

When she does, she's got to have the best man they is anywheres, and I'm going to kick like a steer if he don't measure up to requirements.

TUCKER.

When are you aimin' to git married, Bud?

BUD.

Me! To who?

TUCKER.

To Sonny, of course.

BUD.

What the hell is the matter with you, Ping? You gone loco? I'd give my right arm if that could come true; you know that. But it can't. It just plain can't.

TUCKER.

It can't if you don't ask her. Don't expect her to ask you; do you?

BUD.

(*Frightened.*)

Lord, Ping! I never thought of that. What'd I do if she ever did?

TUCKER.

Say, "yes," like a man.

BUD.

No, Ping. I'd have to tell her about me and her paw, and the minute I did she'd hate me. You know what she thinks.

TUCKER.

Yeh. You've fed her up with a lot of fairy stories about him bein' the bravest critter that ever trod sole leather. Why didn't you let her know the truth?—that he was a ornery whinin' put when he was sober and a murderin', hell-tearin' devil when he was drunk—which was 'most always. You been just a plain damn fool, Bud. I said that before, and I'll leave it lay and copper it with another stack. Say, how many of these here potatoes have we got to skin?

BUD.

Keep on dealin'. We ain't got enough to draw to yet. (TUCKER *drops his knife awkwardly.*) S'matter? You nervous?

TUCKER.

Er—no.

BUD.

Got something on your mind?

TUCKER.

In a way, yeh. Bud, if I was still the marshal, I'd be right busy now. There's a heap of talk in town about this El Malo outlaw.

BUD.

(Kidding him.)

You keep away from them ladies' sewin' bees. Some of these days you're goin' to hear somethin' real naughty.

TUCKER.

(Thoughtfully.)

Might be some truth to it. Maybe he's over in that pass back of Los Pajaros, hidin'.

BUD.

Let's us hide, too, and get even with him.

TUCKER.

(Savagely.)

That dude Bennett wouldn't know how to handle him. Like as not Bennett's over to Viega City this minute at the rodeo. Fine marshal he is, leavin' his town wide open for anybody to come in and steal it! What'd he do if this here bandit swooped down Main Street?

BUD.

He could throw an ice cream cone at him.

TUCKER.

Yeh! Or stick his tongue out sassy. Marshal! Hell!

BUD.

Well, they ain't no danger.

TUCKER.

(Worried.)

I dunno. That El Malo is bad medicine. Did you know he dropped Ex-President Carillo? Shot him straight through the head.

BUD.

Shucks! That hadn't ought to have hurt him. Why didn't he aim at his stummick?

TUCKER.

Reckon such a big target kinda rattled him.

(There is a sound of an auto horn off stage in the distance. Both men jump to their feet.)

BUD.

My God! Don't tell me that train was on time! *(He and TUCKER bolt for door, down right, carrying the potatoes.)* Let me get by. I got to wash my hands; ain't I?

TUCKER.

(Struggling to pass him through the door.)

It won't show up on you like it will on me. I ain't a brunette. *(Exeunt TUCKER and BUD, down right.)*

(There are louder blasts of the auto horn, then the sound of a machine stopping, and general laughter.)

BUD enters, down right, drying his hands on his handkerchief.

BUD.

Where is she?

He rushes out, up center, as TUCKER enters, down right.

TUCKER.

Where is she?

CAROLINE DODSON *enters, up center, carrying a small traveling bag and a suit case. She crosses directly down to TUCKER and speaks crisply.*

CAROLINE.

You are Mr. Tucker? Mr. Williams told us we would find you here.

TUCKER.

(Eyeing approvingly her suit case and bag.)
Yes'm!

McCord and Helm *enter, up center, each carrying a suit case. They remove their hats.*

CAROLINE.

(Introducing them to TUCKER.)

Mr. McCord and Mr. Helm.

(All acknowledge introductions with bows and nods.)

TUCKER.

(To the men.)

You ain't the little friends Sonny was bringin' with her?

HELM.

The very same.

McCord.

We're the little playmates.

TUCKER.

Reckon Bud didn't realize how growed up she is. He come near gittin' some rockin' horses.

Enter BUD, up center, escorting SONNY.

BUD.

Here she is.

SONNY.

(Joyously.)

Ping! *(Skips down to TUCKER and hugs him, then turns to hug BUD.)* Buddy! I'm so glad to be home again. Tell me all about yourself. How are the pigs? And the chickens? And the little brown banty rooster?

BUD.

The banty rooster? He got so dog-gone dangerous we had to kill him.

SONNY.

(Laughing.)

You mustn't tease me any more. I'm grown up now.

BUD.

You are; are you?

SONNY.

And I've learned ever so many terribly important things—Latin and Greek and bridge and how to flirt.

BUD.

What? *(SONNY opens and closes her eyes rapidly in a sidelong, mischievous glance at him.)* Here! Stop that, you young scalawag!

SONNY.

I've got to practice on somebody.

BUD.

Reckon I'll do some practicin' my own self.
Where's that hair brush?

SONNY.

I'm not afraid of you. Not the teeniest, weeniest
bit. Where's Betty?

CAROLINE.

Betty?

SONNY.

My horse!

BUD.

I didn't have no idea you expected to find her
settin' in the parlor.

SONNY.

Silly! Where is that box of candy? (*She crosses
up to CAROLINE, who gives her a box of candy from
her hand bag.*) Have one of the boys take your
bag in there. (*Points to door, down left.*) Will
you, dear? I'll be right back. I'm going to give
Betty a party. (*She starts to center and stops.*)
'There is rum in this. Do you suppose—? Oh, I
don't care. We'll give her a bucket of bromo seltzer
in the morning. (*Exit, up center, going right.*)

(McCord and Helm remove their overcoats and
drop them on the divan.)

TUCKER.

• (*Crossing to CAROLINE.*)

I didn't hear your last name.

CAROLINE.

Dodson.

TUCKER.

Miss?

CAROLINE.

Mrs.

TUCKER.

(Sighing disappointedly.)

I was afraid so. *(He picks up her bag and suit case, and they exeunt, down left.)*

McCORD.

(To BUD.)

You have a fine big place here. How many acres?

BUD.

There's a few miles of it in 'most any direction you want to ride. The Mexican border has got us hemmed in kinda close on the south side.

HELM.

(In center doorway.)

I say, Mac! Did you notice the view from this door?

McCORD.

(Slightly contemptuous.)

Don't pay any attention to him, Williams. He is only a writer.

BUD.

(Admiringly.)

No! Is he? They look just like other men; don't they?

HELM.

(Patronizingly.)

What time does the sun set?

BUD.

Long about evenin'.

HELM.

Do we dress for dinner?

BUD.

We keep on something, as a rule. However, make yourselves at home, both of you. Glad you're here.

HELM.

(Sitting on divan.)

This is my first trip west.

MCCORD.

(Sitting at right of center table.)

Mine, too. I hope we shan't be in the way.

BUD.

Not in mine. Sorry you didn't get here for the round-up and the shippin'; it's the only excitement we have all year.

HELM.

(Disappointed.)

No excitement? I thought the West was so full of color.

BUD.

Not unless you mean sunburn.

MCCORD.

A little of that wouldn't hurt you, Harry.

BUD.

He does look kinda peaked; don't he?

HELM.

(In a grandiose manner.)

My work does that. Creative work is very trying.

BUD.

Well, can't you create out in the open where there's fresh air?

HELM.

Hardly! I write only at night when it's still and—oh, you know—mysterious and romantic.

McCord.

(Jeeringly.)

"Still and mysterious and romantic!" Night was meant for sleep; that's what it was meant for. I do hate to miss my sleep.

BUD.

I better be figgerin' where to put you. Let's see. Miss Dodson's got that room over there next to Sonny.

McCord.

Sonny?

BUD.

Yeh. That's what we call Jacqueline. Her paw couldn't bear women.

McCord.

I see.

BUD.

(Indicating door up left.)

I'll put you boys in here next to me. We got more

rooms then we kin eat. Do you like 'em kinda tight and snug-fittin' or spread round out some so's you kin wallow around?

HELM.

Any kind for me. Just give me one where I can see the sky.

BUD.

You can't miss it, no way you look.

McCord.

I'd like a big bed. That's all I want.

BUD.

Then your every desire will be gratified instant. I'll give you Ol' Man Christy's room.

McCord.

Is he away?

BUD.

Entirely.

HELM.

(To BUD.)

I must get you to tell me something about the early days. I don't suppose there is anything happening now to write about—anything romantic.

BUD.

No'm; they ain't.

HELM.

Of course not. Everything now is money—money! I wish I had lived in the good old days when a chap carried his lady's glove next his heart and fought his way out of tight places. That was living!

McCord.

You poor nut! There are just as many tight places to-day as there ever were. Just because the fight is commercial, that doesn't make it any the less exciting. If you want real sport, you sharpen up your little sword and go jump into the Stock Exchange.

Bud.

(Admiringly.)

Strikes me you're both after big game of some kind. I sure would admire to trail along behind and see you bring it down.

McCord.

I guess you do get sort of rusty out here.

Tucker *enters, down left.*

Bud.

You only got to look at old Ping there to see how deadly rust kin really be.

Tucker.

What's that about me and rust?

Bud.

Ping, in the shinin' blade of his youth, was the border marshal hereabouts.

Helm.

(Interested.)

That's good. The marshal, eh?

McCord.

What do they find to marsh in these days?

TUCKER.

Oh, in the open season, you kin trap a drunk greaser or two. The Mexican border runs straight through the Grand Commercial Hotel in Calico.

HELM.

Have you ever seen any real fighting?

TUCKER.

Yeh. I've saw a few scraps where they drewed guns and blood and maybe a wrong card.

BUD.

Show 'em Gladys.

(TUCKER crosses to center and draws from his hip pocket a worn blue-barreled .44 revolver.)

TUCKER.

Here she is.

HELM.

(Amused.)

I say, that's pretty good, you know. "Gladys."

TUCKER.

She was once pointed at the wickedest train robber that ever stuck up an express.

BUD.

(Innocently.)

No! Who did she belong to when this happened?

TUCKER.

Me and her has sat in some big games in our younger days. She don't help me much around the farm now, though.

McCORD.

(*Interested.*)

Farm? Near Calico?

BUD.

Ping has got a ranch on the corner of Broadway and Eighth Street.

TUCKER.

That reminds me: If I'm going to be cook around this particular shack to-night, I reckon I'd better see how dinner's gittin' on. (*Exit, down right.*)

McCORD.

(*Doubtfully.*)

I'm rather a hearty eater.

BUD.

I admire food some myself. I'll trail to town tomorrow and dig up another chink. Maybe the laundry has got one that kin scorch something besides a shirt.

TUCKER *enters, down right, and halts in the doorway.*

TUCKER.

It's all in the stove.

BUD.

Ping, you talk like an advertisement. What is it?

TUCKER.

Supper. Chong left a roast as thick as your head.

BUD.

Ain't that the most convenient thing? Do you reckon Gladys would be jealous if you was to shoot a few biscuits into the oven?

TUCKER.

I'll see how my trigger finger works. (*Exit, down right.*)

BUD.

Now if you gents will bring your wraps (*picks up the men's suit cases*)—we may as well bed down for the night and have it over with. (*Exit, up right, with the suit cases, followed by McCORD and HELM, carrying their hats and overcoats.*)

SONNY *enters, up center, coming from right. At the door she turns and waves her hand at some one off right, then advances into the room. She looks around it lovingly, then crosses to door down left, as BUD enters, up right. As he comes to center, she crosses back to him and throws her arms around him.*

SONNY.

I can hardly believe that I'm honest, truly home again. Home!

BUD.

It ain't home when you ain't here, honey.

SONNY.

(*Pulling him to divan where they sit.*)

Come over here, and let's have a real talk before anyone else comes in. Have I changed much?

BUD.

Yeh, in a way. I always been used to seein' you in your ridin' togs—your chaps and your old black shirt. And these here things make you look kinda sissified.

SONNY.
(*Wistfully.*)

What good times we did have when we were boys!
Was I much trouble to raise, Bud?

BUD.
Nobody is any trouble when you love 'em, Sonny.

SONNY.
(*Patting his knee tenderly.*)
You've been father and mother and big brother
to me.

BUD.
I'd like to be a deal more to you than that.

SONNY.
(*Innocently.*)
But you couldn't be any more to me than you are
already.

BUD.
(*Hesitating.*)
No; I know I couldn't. (*He changes the subject.*)
How'd you like it back east?

SONNY.
The school is all right, but I get awfully homesick.

BUD.
You look powerful well. How are you feelin'?

SONNY.
(*Evasively.*)
Oh, all right, I guess.

BUD.
Doctor doin' you any good?

SONNY.
(*Sighing.*)

Not much!

BUD.
(*Sympathetically.*)

What's the matter, honey? Has the ol' nightmare been botherin' you again?

SONNY.
(*Shivering.*)

Terribly! I had it almost every night last week just because I happened to pick up a newspaper and read a lot in it about El Malo, the Mexican outlaw. Wasn't that silly?

BUD.
What's El Malo got to do with it?

SONNY.
Nothing! It just shows how frightened and nervous I am all the time. That's one reason why I came home. You're the only one who understands. I do honestly believe, Buddie, that if it weren't for you, I'd want to die and have it over with.

BUD.
Sh! Don't say that, Son! Why, whatever would I do without you?

SONNY.
(*Despairingly.*)

I'm no good to myself or to anybody else this way. I hate a coward. There is nothing on earth as low as a coward, and I'm one, and I can't help myself—
(*Her voice breaks, and she rises and crosses to left.*)

BUD.

(Rising and following her.)

Son, I'm going to spank you and send you to bed like when I caught you smokin' cigarettes that time. You ain't a coward.

SONNY.

I am! I'm as yellow as a coyote.

BUD.

It don't say in my etiquette book that you dast call a lady a liar to her face, but I'm goin' to. You ain't afraid to ride a wild hoss, and you ain't afraid of a cyclone. And what about the time you waltzed over to the doctor and let him set a broken leg without even takin' a gal-size swig of liquor to ease the pain?

SONNY.

(Comforted.)

Oh, that! That was nothing.

BUD.

I'm gamblin' there's a heap of ladies who would faint graceful instead.

SONNY.

(Smiling.)

You old darling! How old are you, Bud?

BUD.

Oh, I'm gettin' on toward forty or fifty. I was thirty-two last spring.

SONNY.

Do you like the boys?

BUD.

Yeh. I always did.

SONNY.

I mean the two I brought with me.

BUD.

(Critically.)

Ye-ah! Not so much that I'd care to kiss 'em often.

SONNY.

(Settling herself in a chair.)

I wish you'd listen to me as closely as ever you can because I'm going to tell you the other reason why I came home. First of all—you love me; don't you, Bud?

BUD.

I sure do, Son.

SONNY.

Cross your heart?

BUD.

Hope to die.

SONNY.

Then you won't mind if I ask you a question?

BUD.

(Uneasily.)

What kind of a question?

SONNY.

Well, this is the whole idea: I'm grown up now, and I'm old enough to be married, and it's going to be to one of those two boys, and I want you to tell me which one.

BUD.

(*Astounded.*)

Hold on! I'm four miles behind you! You what?

SONNY.

I'm going to marry one of them, Bud. I couldn't decide which one, so I thought the best thing to do would be to have them both come home with me and let you choose.

BUD.

Oh!

SONNY.

You know all about men—the right kind of men—because you're one yourself.

BUD.

(*Painfully.*)

Are you so tired of your home that you want to leave it this a way?

SONNY.

I wouldn't leave it, dear. I'd just bring him here to live with us.

BUD.

And you're stuck on both these two kids? That don't seem natural to me.

SONNY.

I'm not. I don't care a rap about either one of them.

BUD.

Sonny, the East has done something fancy to your disposition that sure does fool me. Now you start

the other way around, and maybe I kin git it through my head.

SONNY.

(Hesitatingly.)

I want to get married, Bud.

BUD.

(Patiently.)

Why, honey? They must be some reason.

SONNY.

You—you won't laugh if I tell you?

BUD.

Not a chuckle if it's goin' to hurt your feelin's.

SONNY.

(Awkwardly.)

Well, it's just this: I'm so tired of being a coward and not of any account to the world that I thought—I figured it all out—that—that if I got married I could maybe have six sons. I would like six. Six brave sons to make up for me! And that would show that I did my best, even if I was a coward. And as long as I want six—at least six of them—I don't think I ought to lose much more time; do you?

BUD.

(Deeply touched.)

'That's a beautiful plan, Sonny.

SONNY.

I think so! I thought you would, too, when I told you. I didn't really think you'd laugh at me.

BUD.

No, my dear.

SONNY.

It looks to me like the only thing to do. I thought of everything—nights when I sat up by the window all night long—and there didn't seem to be one single way out of it. And then, all of a sudden, I happened to think of this plan, and after a while I went right to sleep. I was pretty tired.

BUD.

Pore kid!

SONNY.

Of course, I'd rather wait if I could find somebody I loved. I've read that people do find other people that they—you know—just belong to. But that's selfish. A coward hasn't any right to think of himself and I won't. I won't do that.

BUD.

(Slowly.)

Son, didn't it ever strike you that there might be a reason for this here thing that's the matter with you, this—this—

SONNY.

Yellow streak?

BUD.

Well, call it that for the time bein'.

SONNY.

(Rising.)

No, dear. That is one thing there is no excuse for, and you know that as well as I do.

BUD.

(Arguing.)

But they is, sometimes.

SONNY.

Maybe in an ordinary family. But I'm not ordinary; at least I shouldn't be. My father was a pioneer and a brave determined man. That's what you've always told me.

BUD.

(Hanging his head.)

Yeh!

SONNY.

I don't remember my mother, but she must have been brave, too, or he wouldn't have liked her.

BUD.

Your paw had nothin' on your maw fer spunk.

SONNY.

(Passionately.)

Then why should I be like this? It isn't right. It isn't fair to them! Sometimes—sometimes I'm glad they're both dead. I couldn't bear to have them ashamed of me—and they would be. They'd hate me.

BUD.

Son, me and you are goin' to have a long talk one of these days real soon. I don't know as I've been altogether right in keepin' from you a few facts.

SONNY.

About what?

BUD.

About me. Me and your paw.

SONNY.

(Proudly.)

The two bravest men that ever lived.

BUD.

Not me! I ain't so brave.

SONNY.

There is nothing on earth you're afraid of.

BUD.

(*Slowly.*)

Yeh! Just one thing.

SONNY.

(*Laughing.*)

I don't believe you. What is it?

BUD.

A gun!

SONNY.

(*Incredulously.*)

Bud! (*She crosses, laughing, to him.*) You're an old story teller, that's what you are. You're just trying to make me feel better by pretending that you're in my class when you ain't. (*She starts.*) Did you hear me say, "ain't?" I ain't said, "ain't" for a long time.

BUD.

Is it ag'in' the game laws back east?

SONNY.

I just don't hear it; that's all. You get talking the way people around you talk.

BUD.

I hope you ain't going to leave us low westerners sour your grammar on you.

SONNY.

(With broad western dialect.)

No'm. I ain't.

Enter McCORD, up right.

McCORD.

Having a little board meeting?

BUD.

I wasn't. Was you bored, Son?

SONNY.

Sit down, Bob. You'll get used to Bud after a while.

BUD.

Yeh. I git to be kind of a habit.

SONNY.

You're the most comfy habit I know.

BUD.

So is an old pair of shoes. There are times when I wisht I was made of satin and had gold buttons on me. *(At SONNY's puzzled look, he rises and goes down right.)* When do you want to eat?

McCORD.

(Eagerly.)

I'm ready right now.

BUD.

I'll see how Ping feels about it. *(Exit, down right.)*

McCORD.

(Sitting at right of table.)

Nice chap! Does he run the ranch for you?

SONNY.

(Sitting on divan.)

Yes! He's wise and good and—oh, everything!

McCord.

What do you have to pay a fellow like that?

SONNY.

Why, Bob! We own the ranch together. It's as much his as mine.

McCord.

Ah, a relative of yours. I didn't understand that.

SONNY.

No, no relation at all. When he was a little boy, he worked for my father. *(Proudly.)* My father was the bravest man in California.

McCord.

I don't get it. What right has this chap got to claim a partnership in the place?

SONNY.

He doesn't claim any partnership. He wouldn't claim anything. But we sort of grew up together and when father and mother died he looked after me and brought me up. Do you think I could pay him a salary now?

McCord.

(Stubbornly.)

It's only business.

SONNY.

(Rising.)

That's all you think about—business.

McCord.

(Rising and joining her at center.)

What else is there worth while? Show it to me, and if there's anything in it, I'll take a whack at it.

Sonny.

A "whack" at it. Yes; I think you would.
(Giggles and crosses to left.)

McCord.

Sure, I would.

Sonny.

(Pleadingly.)

Anyhow, don't let's quarrel again.

McCord.

I don't like to quarrel, but it seems almost impossible to talk to a woman for five minutes without—

Sonny.

(Laughing.)

Without hitting her. *(Sits at right of table.)*

McCord.

Not quite that, Jack. I'm a brute, but it's hard for a man to remember all the time that women are, after all, just a lot of children.

Sonny.

(Interested, turns to him quickly.)

Do you like children?

McCord.

Lord, yes! Jolly little beggars! They like me, too. I never saw a kid yet that didn't want to climb all over me.

SONNY.

(Excitedly.)

You must be an awfully good man, then. Children know. They can always tell.

McCord.

I prefer them, however, at the ripe old age of five or six. They're not so messy then.

SONNY.

(Disappointed.)

Don't you like little ones? Little teeny ones that you have to rock?

McCord.

(Glaring at her sternly.)

No child of mine will ever be rocked.

SONNY.

(Meekly.)

Suppose he cries!

McCord.

Temper! When a child cries it's temper—just that and nothing else.

SONNY.

(Arguing.)

But it isn't always temper. He might be sick—the poor little thing!

McCord.

Not with the nurses we have to-day.

SONNY.

Nurse? Oh, yes, of course.

McCord.

Some friends of mine back home have three—child-

dren, not nurses—and I give you my word, you'd never know there was a kid on the place. You never see them or hear them. By Jove! I don't believe their own parents get a glimpse of them once a week.

SONNY.

(Horried.)

Where do they keep them? In the cellar?

McCord.

In the nursery, where they belong. It's off in a wing of the house on the top floor.

SONNY.

(Indignantly.)

They can't be very nice children, or their parents wouldn't be ashamed of them.

McCord.

(Crossly.)

They're wonderful children. It's just that they aren't being brought up by the sloppy, old-fashioned method. When they get into a temper, nobody pays any attention to them. If they become frightened, they howl away by themselves until they come to and reason the whole thing out.

SONNY.

(Shivers and rises.)

That would be terrible! Terrible!

McCord.

(Pounds on the table emphatically and rises.)

It's the right way. It's the way I was raised.

SONNY.

(Absently.)

Poor baby! Still yelling!

McCord.

What's the idea?

Sonny.

I didn't mean to think out loud, but for a moment I could just see you lying on your tummy and swearing little baby damns.

McCord.

(Grinning.)

I guess I did, too. *(Takes her hand.)* When are you going to marry me, Jack?

Sonny.

I haven't said that I would.

McCord.

It is going to be me; isn't it?

Sonny.

(Irresolutely.)

I don't know. I—I don't think so.

McCord.

(Darkening as she withdraws her hand.)

Who is it? Harry?

Sonny.

It isn't anybody—yet. It's an awfully important thing—marriage is.

McCord.

Certainly! It's an important step in anybody's life.

Sonny.

But more so in my particular case than you could possibly imagine. You see, I have a reason for getting married.

McCord.

What is it?

Sonny.

(Softly.)

I will never tell it except to the right man.

Enter HELM, up right.

HELM.

Am I interrupting? I hope I am.

Sonny.

(Crossing to him as he comes down center.)

We were just having a little heart-to-heart talk.

HELM.

(Brightly.)

And now it is my turn. *(Significantly, to McCord.)* Don't stand on ceremony, old man.

McCord.

(Nettled at the interruption and standing his ground stubbornly.)

Thanks! I shan't. Nobody enjoys listening to a brilliant conversation any more than I do.

Sonny.

We really don't need a chaperon, Bob.

McCord.

You might. I'm not so sure of these artist fellows.

Sonny.

But he's a writer—not an artist. There's a big difference.

McCord.

What?

SONNY.

(Vaguely.)

Why, an artist has long hair.

HELM.

Let the barber decide upon your career. What could be simpler? Shall we proceed from there?

SONNY.

(Looking at McCORD.)

How can we? We might say something Bob wouldn't like.

McCORD.

(Crossing to settle himself on the divan with a newspaper.)

Don't mind me. I'll have a look at the paper. Pretend I'm not here. *(HELM picks up SONNY's hand and kisses it loudly. McCORD dodges out angrily from behind paper.)* Hey!

HELM.

(Ignoring him.)

Alone at last!

SONNY.

(Mischievously.)

We mustn't talk about Bob, now that he's gone. It wouldn't be nice.

HELM.

Neither nice nor interesting. Shall we speak of me?

SONNY.

Let's do. Tell me all about yourself.

(They sit at the table.)

HELM.

I am a romanticist, pure and simple.

McCord.

(From behind the paper.)

Especially simple.

HELM.

I deal solely in that which is precious in life—pearls of knowledge, rubies and jades of adventure, pale moonstones of introspection, exquisite little cameos of love strung on a golden thread of understanding.

McCord.

(In the voice of an auctioneer.)

What am I offered for the lot?

HELM.

How noisy our secluded spot has become! Is there no way to be free of the rabble?

SONNY.

I'm afraid our only hope is the dinner gong.

HELM.

No matter! Will you marry me, Jack? I am serious, really.

SONNY.

(Embarrassed.)

It doesn't seem to be quite the right time to ask me that.

HELM.

When will be the right time, then? What do you think I came all the way out here for? To see you in your native West where there is still a breath of

romance left; that's why. I didn't make the trip because I was interested in farms as McCord did.

SONNY.

Please! You mustn't.

HELM.

What's the matter?

SONNY.

Don't propose to me like this, on—a crowded business corner.

HELM.

And why not?

McCORD.

(Jumping to his feet and throwing the paper down.)

I'll tell you why not. It's damned indecent; that's what it is! We were having a nice clean conversation about children when you butted in.

HELM.

(Shuddering.)

Children! My God!

SONNY.

(Rising as HELM rises.)

You don't mean to say that you don't like children, Harry?

HELM.

Can you imagine a man trying to write with a lot of—? Don't ask me. *(He sees SONNY's disappointed expression.)* I'm—I'm sorry I said that.

SONNY.

(Absently.)

So am I. There doesn't seem to be anybody left now.

HELM.

(Mystified.)

What?

SONNY.

(Embarrassed.)

Oh! *(To hide her confusion she goes up to center and switches on the lights, since the stage has become gradually darker for the past five minutes.)*

Enter BUD, down right.

BUD.

Any gent present who wants to churn his own particular brand of cocktail?

McCORD.

Me! I've got the world beat! Has it got a kick? Oh, boy! Dynamite simply isn't in it. Come along, and I'll tell you how I do it— *(He follows BUD off down right, talking.)*

HELM.

(Seriously.)

I meant what I said, Jack.

SONNY.

About children?

HELM.

About marrying me.

SONNY.

I'm afraid it's too late to talk about that now.

HELM.

I don't understand you.

SONNY.

(Wistfully.)

Nobody does. Nobody but Bud.

HELM.

Haven't you any romance in you? You should have.

SONNY.

Yes; I should have. My father was the bravest man in California. I love brave men.

HELM.

(Taking her hands.)

Then let me be the one to fight your battles, Jack. There is no danger I would not face for you—no difficulty I could not surmount with you as the incentive. Come with me, dear, and we will spend our lives looking for adventure.

SONNY.

(Absently.)

We couldn't very well travel around with six—

HELM.

Six? There would be only two of us. Just we two.

SONNY.

(Drawing away.)

I don't think you'd better wait for me, Harry. I'm going to be awfully busy for the next few years.

Enter CAROLINE, down left.

CAROLINE.

You should have rested, Jacqueline.

SONNY.

(Meeting her at center.)

I'm truly not tired, and it's almost dinner time.

CAROLINE.

Have the trunks come?

SONNY.

Not yet. Will you phone the station, Harry?
(HELM crosses and picks up the telephone receiver.)
Do you like my home, Carrie? *(CAROLINE puts her arms around SONNY and nods affectionately.)* And Bud? And Ping?

CAROLINE.

(Indignantly.)

What a ridiculous name! Had his parents no sense of humor?

HELM.

(Who has been vainly trying to get the telephone operator.)

Hello! Hello

SONNY.

(To CAROLINE.)

Ping will be crazy about you. Don't flirt with him. He's such an innocent old dear.

CAROLINE.

I have yet to see an innocent man, and if I did, I wouldn't look at him.

HELM.

(Speaking into mouthpiece.)

Hello! *(To the others.)* Say, what the dickens is the matter with this thing?

SONNY.

(Crossing to table near him.)

Won't it work?

HELM.

I can't hear anything but a lot of weird noises. It sounds like *(listens intently)*—like a fight.

SONNY.

(Startled.)

A fight!

She goes up stage to look out of the center door, as McCORD, BUD, and TUCKER enter, down right, McCORD carrying a cocktail shaker, and BUD and TUCKER glasses on a tray.

BUD.

(Admiringly.)

This boy here has sure got a graceful arm movement.

McCORD.

(Crossing to table, where he pours the cocktails.)

Gather round me, little playmates. I am about to let some sunshine into your sad lives.

TUCKER.

I always had an idee that cocktails was baby food, but I seen what went into this one.

BUD.

What's it apt to do to a shy, retirin' nature like mine?

McCord.

Ask Helm.

HELM.

After two of these, you will understand the impetuous mule as you never did before.

(TUCKER crosses to SONNY and CAROLINE, who are near the divan and offers them a glass apiece. SONNY shakes her head in refusal.)

TUCKER.

(To CAROLINE.)

Does the sight of strong liquor frighten you, ma'am?

CAROLINE.

(Accepting a glass.)

I am a fearless woman.

HELM.

(Raising his glass in a toast.)

To the West—the gay old land of adventure!

McCord.

And opportunity!

(As they laugh and drink, FRANCELIA's frightened voice is heard off center.)

FRANCELIA.

(Calling.)

Señors! Señor Williams!

She enters, up center, coming from left, disheveled and with her skirt torn.

BUD.

Hullo! What's the row, Francelia?

FRANCELIA.

(Coming down center.)

El Malo! El Malo is in the town.

TUCKER.

(Roaring.)

What!

.(There is a general movement of consternation.)

FRANCELIA.

(Hurriedly.)

I am there, and I see with my own eyes. Feefty, maybe hundred men! They ride down the street like beeg stampede. Nobody know what ees those gun shooting for until they see all those Mexicanos racing down the street in cloud of dust. Then everybody hide. Me, I spur that buckskin most terrible and don't look back. Eef he come this way, señors, what we going to do?

McCORD.

Not El Malo! Not the bandit we've been reading about?

HELM.

(Collapsing, panic-stricken.)

Oh, my God!

TUCKER.

Where's Bennett, the marshal?

FRANCELIA.

At the rodeo in Viega City, señor.

TUCKER.

(Grimly.)

Yah! I thought so.

FRANCELIA.

(To BUD.)

What we going to do, señor?

BUD.

(Slowly.)

I—don't know. How many horses can we get, Francelia?

SONNY.

(Amazed.)

You're not going to run away?

BUD.

Frank can take you two girls on to the city. We'll stay here and look after the house.

SONNY.

No. I'll stay here with you, Bud.

TUCKER.

(To CAROLINE.)

How about you, ma'am?

CAROLINE.

(Disdainfully.)

I'll stay, too. The man doesn't live that I'm afraid of.

TUCKER.

Good! I reckon me and Gladys kin take care of you. I'll just step out and take a look-see, Bud.

He goes up to center door and exits. A shot is fired, off center. He reënters hastily.

TUCKER.

Turn out them lights.

(BUD switches off the lights, and he and TUCKER bar the center door and the right window blind. McCORD and HELM do the same at the left window. The stage is in darkness except for the light coming through the open door down right.)

BUD.

(At right window, peering through blind.)

They've beat us to it, Ping. They've cut us off. Look at 'em. They're circlin' around like a pack of wolves.

TUCKER.

Anybody got a gun but me?

McCORD.

I have, in my suit case. Have you got one, Harry?

HELM.

(Whimpering.)

No! Who the devil would expect anything like this to happen in this civilized day and age?

BUD.

Ping, you better hold down the north side of the house. The boys kin take the south end, and I'll watch the door here. Git busy. No tellin' when they'll make a dash for us.

(McCORD and HELM go out, up right.)

CAROLINE.

(Coming up to TUCKER.)

Shall I put on a kettle of water? I can't shoot, but I can try my hand at scalding.

TUCKER.

(Sentimentally.)

Ma'am, when this cruel war is over—

CAROLINE.

You had better fight first and talk later.

TUCKER.

(Bluntly.)

Then quit taggin' me around. This is a man's game, not a pink tea.

CAROLINE.

(Furiously.)

You are perfectly right. *(Exit, down right.)*

TUCKER.

(Crossing to up left.)

You all right there, Bud?

BUD.

(At center door.)

Yeh!

TUCKER.

Where's Sonny?

SONNY.

(At left window.)

I'm here with Bud.

TUCKER.

I reckon, Bud, you better send Francelia around to close up the back of the house.

BUD.

Francelia!

FRANCELIA.

Si, señor!

(Exit TUCKER, up left. FRANCELIA crosses and goes out, down right. There is a short pause.)

BUD.

(Gently.)

You afraid, Sonny?

SONNY.

Not with you. You're not afraid; are you, Bud?
(BUD laughs.) You'd never be afraid; would you, Bud?

BUD.

Not for myself. Why, honey?

SONNY.

(Meditatively.)

You know what I told you this afternoon about getting married. I was just thinking—you'd make a pretty good father yourself!

CURTAIN

SONNY

SECOND ACT

SCENE: *Same as in Act I.*

At rise of curtain, BUD is seated left of table playing a game of solitaire. SONNY is up stage at window at center right, peering through a crack in the blinds. The room is in half light. A flood of light comes through the kitchen door down right, and there is a lighted candle on the table by BUD. He stops his game, looks at his watch, and about the room as if making despairing calculations. His glance comes to rest on SONNY with anxious tenderness. When he speaks, however, it is in the lightest of tones.

BUD.

Ain't you goin' to help me with this here game, honey? I might cheat myself if you ain't here to watch me.

SONNY.

How can you play solitaire when El Malo and his men are apt to rush us at any minute?

BUD.

They been quiet for a couple of hours now. How do you know they ain't changed their mind and gone on away?

SONNY.

I can see them. They've built little camp fires in a circle all around us.

BUD.

(Casually.)

Must be a right pretty sight. I'll go and look when I git through here. *(He studies his game, absorbed.)* Reckon I'm stuck. Yes, sir; they ain't a play. Well, that makes just seventeen hundred and four dollars I owe myself. Hold on! I wonder if I durst do that?

SONNY.

(Coming down to him.)

What?

BUD.

Put that there four over here and git out my five of hearts.

SONNY.

(Sitting at table.)

Of course you can. That will give you the six of clubs, too.

BUD.

(Delighted.)

Dog-gone me if I don't believe that will win the game for us, that one move! And here I was afraid to take it on my own responsibility without bein' advised proper.

SONNY.

(Smiling.)

You old fraud!

BUD.

(Innocently.)

What's the matter?

SONNY.

You're just doing this to get me interested so I'll forget how scared I am.

BUD.

(Apparently astonished.)

Scared, honey? Shucks! What of?

SONNY.

They say that Mexicans are pretty terrible when it comes to women.

BUD.

You kin leave out the word "pretty." The only greaser I ever seen that looked pretty to me, he was a lavalier on a rope necklace.

SONNY.

(With a sudden outburst.)

I want to be brave, Bud! I want to be and I'm—I'm a coward!

BUD.

You ain't a coward, Son. They ain't another girl I know of that'd be as game as you've been to-night. You ain't turned a hair up to now, and you're only doin' this because you ain't slept fer three or four nights, you said.

SONNY.

(Burying her face in her arms.)

I want to be brave like my father. *(Weeps.)*

(*A peculiar expression comes over BUD's face. He leans over and pats her shoulder.*)

BUD.

Reckon if he was alive it'd hurt him powerful to see you cry.

SONNY.

(*Drying her eyes.*)

I mustn't, then. Talk to me about him for a while, and that will help me more than anything. Was he tall?

BUD.

Was he! He must of been all of six feet three and a half, and with all that size he was gentle as a lamb.

SONNY.

But not too gentle. He could fight; couldn't he?

BUD.

Not until he was provoked to a fairly obnoxious degree, and then!

SONNY.

(*Nodding, satisfied.*)

Then! Did he have any faults?

BUD.

Le's see: Seems strange but I can't remember a single one.

SONNY.

He didn't drink; did he?

BUD.

(*Exploding.*)

No!

SONNY.

Nor gamble?

BUD.

Only when backed into a corner, you might say.

SONNY.

I wouldn't mind that, because I do like bridge myself. What a dear he was! What a wise, noble, splendid man he was! (*She muses happily.*) He must have been kind and sweet to my mother. (*BUD rises abruptly, but SONNY is too much engrossed in her own thoughts to notice him.*) And so were you.

BUD.

(*Huskily.*)

She was the only mother I ever knowed.

SONNY.

(*Softly.*)

And she loved you, of course. I—I love you, too. But you don't love me.

BUD.

How do you know I don't?

SONNY.

You'd say so if you did. (*BUD moves away restlessly.*) I know why you don't: It's because I'm a coward.

BUD.

(*Roughly.*)

God A'mighty, Son! Don't drive me crazy. I've loved you ever since you was a foot high holdin' onto my finger and tryin' to learn how to walk. I love you better then anything in heaven or on earth.

SONNY.

(Rising.)

How was I to know if you didn't tell me?

BUD.

I didn't have the right to tell you. I ain't got it now. I can't ask you to marry me, honey.

SONNY.

Why not? Is there—another woman?

BUD.

Lord, no! They ain't ever been any woman fer me but you, honey.

SONNY.

Then what is it, Bud? Something you did? *(He nods his head miserably.)* When? *(There is no response.)* A long time ago? *(He nods hesitating.)* I can't believe it was so terrible, because I know how brave and how good you are.

BUD.

I ain't brave, and I ain't good.

SONNY.

My father was a just man. Did he forgive you?

BUD.

(After a long struggle with himself.)

He didn't forgive me. No. *(SONNY backs away from him, hardening.)*

McCord enters, up right.

McCord.

No matter what happens, I'm going to eat. *(BUD crosses up to look out of window up center right.)*

SONNY *watches him, disappointed and cynical. McCORD crosses to table.*) I feel like an empty warehouse in the middle of a desert (*he picks up and looks into the dry cocktail shaker*)—and not a drop of rain in sight.

SONNY.

(*Crossing to down right.*)

Caroline is making coffee. I'll get you some.

McCORD.

Good old Caroline! I never really appreciated her before. I'll say you girls are standing the gaff like a couple of soldiers. Haven't you been worrying for fear these greasers would break in and stick a knife into you?

SONNY.

(*Contemptuously.*)

I'm not afraid of physical pain. Who cares if it's just their body that's stabbed through and through?
(*Exit, down right.*)

McCORD.

(*Looking after her, then to BUD.*)

Is there any insanity in her family?

BUD.

Not unless she inherits the Saturday night kind from her pa. He used to have some right smart fights with a pink elephant that played the banjo.

McCORD.

Did it scare him?

BUD.

He didn't mind the elephant, but he hated music.

McCord.

I'll bet he was an old son of a gun. (*He sits at right of table.*) What is the matter with Jack? Is the strain too much for her?

Bud.

I reckon it always has been, pore kid! Ever since she was a baby she's had a nightmare that somebody was chokin' her. It comes and goes regular, and in between times she's either trying to git over the last one or gettin' ready to be afraid of the next one.

McCord.

(*Interested.*)

That's quite extraordinary. You've had doctors, of course?

Bud.

Heaps of 'em, but they ain't helped her none.

McCord.

Have you ever tried nerve specialists?

Bud.

Yeh! They's one back east treatin' her now.

McCord.

Is he making any headway?

Bud.

No'm; he ain't.

McCord.

If he's a competent man he ought to be able to do something.

BUD.

(Slowly, looking off down right.)

I don't know about that. I reckon there ain't no cure for the truth.

McCORD.

(Rising, astounded.)

You don't mean to say some one actually did choke her?

BUD.

Not her; her ma. Her mother. Jack seen it done with her own eyes when she was three years old.

McCORD.

And doesn't remember it?

BUD.

(Grimly.)

She remembers it, all right!

McCORD.

But not as a substantial fact. Why don't you tell her?

BUD.

(Painfully.)

I can't.

McCORD.

Why not.

BUD.

(Turns away.)

I can't!

McCord.

(*Coldly.*)

Excuse me for being curious. It strikes me if you really wanted to help the girl, that would be the thing to do. You owe it to her to explain what you know of the case.

Bud.

(*Awkwardly.*)

She'd hate me if she knew.

McCord.

Why? Was it—you?

Bud.

(*Blazing out at him.*)

By God, no! Do you think I'd lay my hands on a woman who was like a mother to me?

McCord.

(*Stepping back hastily.*)

That's all right—quite right. Just a suggestion on my part. I was merely trying to do a little good. Now listen to me, Williams, and don't burst a blood vessel unnecessarily.

Bud.

(*Resentfully.*)

I'm a-listenin'.

McCord.

I will speak plainly for Jack's sake. I take it you are fond of her.

Bud.

(*Quietly.*)

Some!

McCord.

Not as fond of her as I am, but still you are fond of her, and you want her cured of this.

Bud.

I'd give my left leg if things hadn't happened like they did.

McCord.

But they did happen. Now what you must do, and do right away, is to tell out and out just what took place and why. That is the first step.

Bud.

I'm afraid it would mighty near kill her if she knew who did it.

McCord.

(Impatiently.)

In the name of God, why? Who was it that choked her mother?

Bud.

Her own father.

McCord.

(After an astonished whistle.)

What did the mother do?

Bud.

All she knew how to do, pore little lady! She died a week later from the shock.

McCord.

And—he?

Bud.

(Grimly.)

Didn't live quite that long.

McCord.

(After a pause.)

That is the most remarkable story I ever heard.

Bud.

It ain't fer Sonny to hear.

McCord.

Perhaps you're right. This present affair is apt to have a bad effect on her. What do you think?

Bud.

(Desperately.)

I don't dare to think.

McCord.

I say, are we in any very great danger?

Bud.

No; no more than Daniel was, when they throwed him in the lion's front yard.

McCord.

Is it as bad as that? We should do something.

Bud.

Just what would you suggest?

McCord.

It's simple enough. Let's get away from here.

Bud.

They's close onto a hundred greasers around this house.

McCord.

Telephone for help.

BUD.

They've smashed the line office at Calico.

McCord.

(After a thoughtful pause.)

I'd better act while I've still got an appetite.
(Exit, down right. BUD goes up stage and peers through the window shade.)

HELM.

(Despairingly, off up right.)

My God!

BUD turns quickly. HELM enters, up right, disheveled and trembling.

HELM.

(Crosses at center to BUD.)

They've got him.

BUD.

Who?

HELM.

One minute I saw him alive and well, and the next—I—I must have dozed off for a while, and when I awoke he was gone!

BUD.

Who's this? Somebody you was watchin'?

HELM.

I tell you, I was right in the room with him. He's gone!

BUD.

You don't mean McCord?

HELM.

Yes, yes! McCord! The chap who came with me.

BUD.

Ain't that pitiful?

HELM.

(Collapsing on divan.)

What a night!

BUD.

'Tain't over yet.

HELM.

(Looking haggard.)

Poor old Bob! The chances are he became desperate and ventured forth. I didn't think he had it in him.

BUD.

He was pretty empty the last time I seen him.

HELM.

(Disconsolately.)

Empty! Everything is empty. Life is. I wish I had a drink.

BUD.

There's a flask in this here drawer some place.
(He opens table drawer at left center and takes out a flask of whisky.) I put it here in a case—

HELM.

(Taking the flask.)

In case I needed it. Thanks. *(Takes a drink.)*

BUD.

(Dryly.)

We aim to apprehend our guests.

HELM.

(Dejectedly.)

What will they do to him? I can imagine the most horrible tortures—hideous ghastly things! I wrote a story about them once. I didn't think at the time that McCord—! My God! If I only had warned him, he might have been saved from this.

McCord *appears in doorway, down right, carrying a cup of coffee and a huge sandwich.*

HELM.

You! *(Looks at BUD, then at McCORD, then takes another drink.)*

McCORD.

(With his mouth full of sandwich.)

Come on in. The water's fine.

HELM.

(Speechless for a minute, then drops on divan.)

What the devil do you mean by running away and leaving me alone in there?

McCORD.

How did I know you were going to wake up and cry?

BUD.

I give him his bottle.

HELM.

(Glaring at both of them.)

I don't doubt that both of you have an excellent

sense of humor, but this is hardly the time to be funny.

McCORD.

Aw, come on in and get a cup of hot coffee. That will bring your dimples back.

HELM.

(Sulkily.)

I don't want anything.

McCORD.

It may be the last call from the diner.

HELM.

Don't let me keep you from adding a few pounds to your weight.

McCORD.

Don't worry. They say that running is good for the figure. *(Exit, down right.)*

HELM.

(Gets the meaning of McCORD's words.)

Ru—running! Oh! *(Takes another drink, then hands flask to BUD, goes up and peers out of window at center right.)*

BUD.

(Putting flask on table at center right.)

Nice out, ain't it?

HELM.

(Grumbling.)

I don't see anything nice about it.

BUD.

Why, I should think this kind of a night would just suit you.

HELM.

Why?

BUD.

Oh! It's kinda still and mysterious and romantic.

HELM.

What do you know about romance?

BUD.

(Meekly.)

Nothin'. I'm just an ordinary white man.

HELM.

(In a superior tone.)

Do you ever read books?

BUD.

I had one once about a drawbridge and crossin' a moat horseback, but I couldn't figger how you could cross a moat horseback when it was somethin' you'd ought to pluck out of your brother's eye.

HELM.

(Aloud to himself.)

Unbelievable!

BUD.

It sure was. This here would make a nice story, though.

HELM.

(Uneasily.)

There is no plot to this. It's merely an awkward situation.

BUD.

Couldn't you call it "Help Wanted"?

HELM.

(*Exasperated.*)

The worst of it all is that we are doing absolutely nothing about it. Action is what we want. Action and initiative. Can't we patch up a truce?

BUD.

They ain't one about the house. I've always been healthy myself.

HELM.

(*Angrily.*)

You either cannot or will not understand me.

BUD.

Yes; I do. You're scared.

HELM.

(*Helplessly.*)

By Jove! I wonder if I am.

BUD.

(*Not unkindly, as he hands HELM the flask.*)

Swaller another jolt of this and go on back to bed. (HELM takes drink and hands flask back.) I'll wake you when the time comes.

(HELM grabs the flask again, takes two big drinks, hands it back with much ceremony, and crosses to divan.)

HELM.

(*Very superior.*)

You are utterly mistaken, sir. I am not afraid of anything.

BUD.

(Examining flask admiringly, crosses to table at left.)

'This here must be great stuff.

HELM.

(Sitting on right end of divan.)

But I'm tired, I'm devilish tired. *(Drops his face in his hands.)*

As BUD returns flask to drawer, SONNY enters, down right, excitedly.

SONNY.

Bud!

BUD.

(Crosses to center.)

What's up?

SONNY.

(Crosses to BUD.)

It's all right. They won't bother us for a while. They're waiting for him to come.

BUD.

Who? El Malo?

SONNY.

Yes. He hasn't got here yet.

BUD.

How did you find that out?

SONNY.

Francelia crawled over to their camp and listened to the men as they lay around the fire talking.

BUD.

Why ain't El Malo with them?

SONNY.

She couldn't find that out. But she says we don't have to worry as long as he keeps away. The men are so afraid of him that they don't dare make a move unless he says so.

BUD.

Well, that's that. We got a minute longer to breathe safe.

(HELM groans. SONNY looks at BUD, who pantomimes that HELM is frightened and, going up to center, switches on lights. SONNY crosses to HELM and sits on his left. The lights go full up on cue.)

SONNY.

It isn't a very restful night; is it, Harry?

HELM.

I got a little sleep.

SONNY.

Sleep! I thought you were on guard.

BUD.

(Crossing down center.)

They divided the work even. Helm slept and McCord watched.

HELM.

There wasn't anything worth watching. I'm not interested in a band of dirty Mexicans.

BUD.

(At center left.)

They may grow on you as the time passes.

SONNY.

(Gently.)

You mustn't be a coward, like me, Harry.

HELM.

(Flaring up.)

What!

SONNY.

(Remorsefully.)

Oh! I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to say that. Did I, Bud?

BUD.

(Crossing to them.)

I don't think you did, Son. I been kinda raggin' him myself when I hadn't orter.

SONNY.

(Putting a hand on HELM's.)

You see, we're both sorry, Harry.

HELM.

I'm sure I don't care what happens.

SONNY.

Of course you don't. There isn't any real danger. It's just fun.

HELM.

(Brightening.)

I suppose you get this sort of thing every day out here? What are they trying to do? Have a little sport with us?

SONNY.

That's all. They—they are very playful; aren't they, Bud?

BUD.

(*Grimly.*)

Reg'lar cut-ups. (*Goes up to window at center left.*)

HELM.

(*Relieved.*)

After all, I might get a story out of this.

SONNY.

(*Encouragingly.*)

It would be so different from your other work. Maybe the publishers would accept it.

HELM.

A young author, say—a young author barricades himself in a lonely house against a thousand Mexicans. No water, no food—

SONNY.

What about that roast that Chong left?

HELM.

It's not necessary to mention the roast. That's a mere detail.

BUD.

(*Down center left.*)

It's bone by this time, anyway. McCord's in the kitchen.

HELM.

(*Rising.*)

By Jove! That reminds me: I haven't eaten since yesterday.

BUD.

You better hurry.

HELM.

Knowing Bob the way I do, I agree with you.

FRANCELIA *enters, down right, and crosses directly to BUD. The attention of BUD and SONNY becomes centered on FRANCELIA to the exclusion of HELM. As HELM continues speaking, BUD speaks through and over his line.*

HELM.

If you will excuse me I will just see how much damage he has done.

BUD.

(Simultaneously.)

Good girl, Francelia! How'd you git over there 'thout 'em seein' you leave the house?

(HELM glares at them and exit, down right. SONNY rises after FRANCELIA crosses to center.)

FRANCELIA.

By the arroyo, señor. I crawl flat, like snake, till I come to the corral, and—what you think?—I find all our horses still there. They have not take as much as one horse from us.

BUD.

That's funny!

SONNY.

Maybe they had plenty.

BUD.

That word ain't in the greaser language. Go on, Frank.

FRANCELIA.

From there I crawl easy, easy, over to one of those camp fires, close, but not too close; and I open the ear ver' wide.

BUD.

Yeh?

FRANCELIA.

After a while one say, "Where is he?" And another say (*she shrugs her shoulders eloquently*)—Then another one he say, "We do our part. Why he don't come to finish up?" And another one say—(*She repeats the shrug.*)

BUD.

Wait. I want Ping to hear this. (*Crosses to door up left and calls.*) Ping, come here a minute.

SONNY.

What does it all mean?

FRANCELIA *answers with another shrug.* TUCKER *enters, up left, crosses down left, and throws his gun on table.*

TUCKER.

I ain't sure this here hand will ever be normal again. I've held Gladys for six straight hours now.

BUD.

(*Crossing down center left.*)

I want you to hear this, Ping. Francelia has been over to their camp.

TUCKER.

(*Eyeing FRANCELIA suspiciously.*)

As friend or enemy?

BUD.

She jest left a callin' card an' drove on away.

SONNY.

Don't make fun of her. She's done a very brave thing.

(FRANCELIA beams at her gratefully and makes a slight bow. BUD slaps her on the shoulder and crosses up center right.)

TUCKER.

(Crossing to FRANCELIA.)

Did you find out anything, Francelia?

FRANCELIA.

Si, señor.

TUCKER.

What was it?

FRANCELIA.

They wait for El Malo.

(BUD crosses down left.)

TUCKER.

What! Ain't he with them?

FRANCELIA.

Not yet, señor. It is for that they do not attack us more quick and take this rancho.

TUCKER.

What makes you think they got that pretty idea?

FRANCELIA.

I hear them talk. El Malo going to take this place for himself. He always like this place. He

going to take it. He ride from El Puerto, three hundred mile, just for capture this one house.

SONNY.

(*At center right.*)

Did they say that?

FRANCELIA.

I do not like to tell you those bad news, señorita, but it is all true. El Malo want only this one place; when he get it he going to live here always.

SONNY.

(*Goes to BUD, down left.*)

Why—should he want just this particular ranch?

BUD.

Don't you worry, Son. He ain't goin' to git it.

SONNY.

But he must have some reason for wanting it.

BUD.

Likely because it's handy to the border, an' he's got his eye on all our hosses.

TUCKER.

(*At center, fuming.*)

And they ain't a town within a day's ride that could put up a he-fight! O'nery coyote! Don't they know where El Malo is?

FRANCELIA.

(*At center right.*)

No, señor, only that he is on the way. He is coming. He be here maybe ver' soon now, and so soon as he arrives they goin' say, "bing, bing, bing!" an' shoot us all to hell.

TUCKER.

(Makes a restless turn and returns, bursting out explosively, as he pauses at center.)

Where's that fool Bennett? Why ain't somebody on the job that kin handle a thing like this? I ain't the marshal now. I ain't got any authority. If I had, I'd go after this measly greaser and git him, alive or dead—or an invalid. I ain't afraid of him! He needn't think I am. If he had a whole army back of him, I'd git him just the same. But I ain't got the right to do it now. My hands are tied, damn it!

BUD.

(Crossing to TUCKER at center.)

Don't go settin' off all your firecrackers to oncet, Ping.

TUCKER.

(Roaring.)

What in everlasting brimstone are we goin' to do about it?

BUD.

Stick here an' see it through, I reckon. We got these strange folks to look after.

TUCKER.

Dog-gone strange, some of 'em! Where are they now? Sleeping pretty?

BUD.

They're in the kitchen eatin'. Mrs. Dodson made some coffee.

TUCKER.

(Relaxing.)

I like that woman. *(Crosses to center right and*

looks off.) As fur as I kin see, she ain't got a hang-nail to her character.

BUD.

(To FRANCELIA, who is up center right.)

Francelia, you take Ping's place on the south side while he investigates a few victuals.

FRANCELIA.

Si, señor! *(She comes to BUD at center.)* Maybe if we are lucky, El Malo he wait till morning before he move in this house.

TUCKER.

(At right.)

We ain't put out the "for rent" sign yet. Francelia you go to the Commercial Hotel in Calico. Get in somehow. I'll meet you there.

(FRANCELIA shrugs her shoulders and exit, down left.)

BUD.

(To SONNY, who has been watching intently as she sits at table at center left.)

Son, you got to rest. You're as white as a sack.

SONNY.

(Trying to control her fright.)

I'm all right. I don't mind, really.

BUD.

They ain't a mite of danger until dawn, and by that time somethin' will turn up to git us out of this scrape. Lie down there on the sofa for an hour or so; will you? *(Lifts her gently from her chair and moves toward divan at center right.)*

TUCKER.

(At right.)

Come on, Sonny. You don't want to git yourself all wore out before the show starts.

SONNY.

(Clinging to BUD in sudden panic at center.)

I'm afraid, Bud. I'm afraid!

BUD.

Sh, honey! Nothin' kin happen to you while me an' Ping is around. Do you hear?

SONNY.

Yes; I hear, but my stomach won't listen.

BUD.

Pore tired little fellah! Curl up here and take a nap to please Bud.

SONNY.

I couldn't sleep.

BUD.

(Putting her on divan.)

You ain't tired, but you could rest, anyway. I want you to. I'll sit right down here by you.

SONNY.

I'll lie down if you'll go and get something to eat.

TUCKER.

(At right.)

That's fair enough. You go on, Bud. I'll hold up the traffic on this corner. *(Crosses up to window at center right.)*

BUD.

I sure could make friends easy with a cup of coffee.

SONNY.

Go ahead and do it then. (*She stretches out full length on divan, yawning wearily.*) Oh, this is nice! I didn't know how tired I was.

BUD.

(*Arranging pillows under her head, at right.*)
Comfy?

SONNY.

(*Sighs.*)

Uh-huh! (*Meaning "yes."*)

(*SONNY's right hand is hanging in an uncomfortable position. He raises it to make her more comfortable, hesitates, then kisses it before laying it down, starts to go. SONNY raises up to be kissed properly. BUD hesitates for the first time to kiss her, does kiss her awkwardly on the forehead, and exit, down right. TUCKER sees this from up center left. SONNY smiles and lies back.*)

TUCKER.

(*Crossing down center right.*)

So that's how it is? Well, well! Still, it oughtn't to surprise me none. Was you, Sonny?

SONNY.

Was I what?

TUCKER.

Was you surprised when he asked you?

SONNY.

(Drowsily.)

He didn't. I asked him. I'm pretty sure that he is the right one.

TUCKER.

Was you stalkin' down some other wild men, too?
(Crosses to left of table and sits.)

SONNY.

(Yawns.)

Uh-huh! The wilder, the better.

TUCKER.

What fer?

SONNY.

I had six reasons. *(She falls asleep.)*

TUCKER.

Lord! Women sure are a language I don't speak.
(There is no answer but a sigh from SONNY. She is asleep.)

CAROLINE enters, down right, with a tray of food on which are also plate, knife, fork, spoon, cup, and saucer. She crosses to table and sets it in front of TUCKER.

CAROLINE.

(Bluntly.)

I hope you won't call this tagging you around.

TUCKER.

(Indicating SONNY, rises.)

Sh!

CAROLINE.

(Turning to look at her.)

Poor child! *(She goes up center left and turns off the lights, leaving the room lighted only by the candle on the table, then comes down center.)* Why doesn't she go to her own room, where it's quiet?

TUCKER.

(Standing at left.)

I reckon, woman-like, she wanted to be under the protection of a strong man's eye.

CAROLINE.

Try that coffee and see if it's masculine enough for you.

TUCKER.

(Sits and tastes coffee.)

Ma'am, that is he-coffee, hell-bent.

CAROLINE.

I am glad there is one thing I can do to please you.
(She starts toward down right.)

TUCKER.

(Rising.)

There's two things. You can set down by me here and limber up yore memory. I would admire to know more about you and why.

CAROLINE.

(At center.)

Why?

TUCKER.

When, wherefore, and which.

CAROLINE.

Are you interested or merely curious?

TUCKER.

Both! And you can add lonesome to the heap, for good measure.

CAROLINE.

(Hesitates a moment, then sits at center left, while he sits at left.)

I shall begin at the beginning. Although I'm known as Mrs. Dodson, I have never been married. I am Miss Dodson.

TUCKER.

(Admiringly.)

Straight from the hip!

CAROLINE.

I was engaged years ago to a person who ran away the day before our wedding, and has since never been heard of.

TUCKER.

(Eating.)

The coward!

CAROLINE.

I don't know what his object was. I loved Winkie very much, and I am positive that Winkie loved me.

TUCKER.

(Putting down his knife and fork.)

What did you say this party's name was?

CAROLINE.

(In some confusion.)

Well—er—Winkie was not his real name. It was a pet name I had for him.

TUCKER.

(Disgustedly.)

Winkie! Did he have pink-eye or somethin'?

CAROLINE.

Oh, no! But when we went to the drug store on Sunday evenings for soda, he always winked at the clerk, for some reason.

TUCKER.

Was it a dry town?

CAROLINE.

On the contrary, it rained very often.

TUCKER.

And was you and Winkie on friendly terms up to the minute of his mysterious and ignoble departure?
(Goes on eating.)

CAROLINE.

Very. We had a few misunderstandings. I was not as broad minded then as I am now. But the last walk we took together, he was unusually gay. He sang and danced for joy right in the street. We went back four times more for soda.

TUCKER.

(Interested.)

How'd you git him home?

CAROLINE.

He lived upstairs over the drug store. (TUCKER

takes a hasty swallow of coffee.) I never saw him again. For business reasons I call myself Mrs. Dodson because it has a weightier sound than Miss. I am a teacher in a girls' school back east. I think that is all. (SONNY *stirs*. CAROLINE *looks her way affectionately*.) Jacqueline is my favorite pupil. She is the only one besides Winkie who ever called me Carrie.

TUCKER.

Everybody else was afraid of you, Carrie.

CAROLINE.

(Seriously.)

Yes; I frighten people. I don't mean to, but I do. It's just my way, Ping.

TUCKER.

(Pushing back his plate.)

I wish I knew what would frighten off them helions out there.

CAROLINE.

Why don't you shoot at them?

TUCKER.

(Shaking his head.)

Carrie, I've seen the time when I would of broken my neck to git into a one-sided scrap like this. I was used to 'em when I was twenty-five, but I ain't now. I've lost my authority and my technique. I'm around fifty—past fifty—and I'm free to confess to you that slippers looks better to me than shotguns. I don't say I ain't goin' to see this thing through, and see it through plenty, but I'd just as soon be home on that little ranch of mine.

CAROLINE.

(Interested.)

What kind of a stove have you?

TUCKER.

A regular eight-cylinder range. You kin cook a whole sheep in it.

CAROLINE.

Hum! You must have quite a large house.

TUCKER.

Yeh. It used to be the dee-po! There's a switch-in' track still runs right up to the back door, and I got a little hand car that I kin jump into when it's a pleasant day an' I feel like motorin'.

CAROLINE.

And you live there all alone?

TUCKER.

(Significantly.)

I did, Carrie.

CAROLINE.

(Suspiciously.)

That sounds to me like a proposal of marriage.

TUCKER.

(Blandly.)

I had every intention of making just that kind of a sound.

CAROLINE.

(Stiffly.)

Isn't it rather extraordinary, under the circumstances? You met me for the first time but a few hours ago.

TUCKER.

I'm a man of snap judgment, Carrie. I don't have to set on a corral fence for six months watchin' your disposition, ner pry open your mouth and look at your teeth to see how old you are. I like you. I like you, thorough, personal, and entire. What might be your remark on the subject?

CAROLINE.

(Rising.)

I will let you know to-morrow.

TUCKER.

(Rising and glancing toward window.)

I hope that won't be too late. One reason I had in puttin' the deal through quick was to offer myself while I was still architecturally complete.

CAROLINE.

(Holding out her hand.)

Nothing will happen to you; I'm sure of that.

TUCKER.

(Taking her hand.)

I'll be right amused if your hunch runs true to form. I'm too old to grow much new skin. *(She starts to go. He detains her by holding on to her hand.)* And remember, Carrie, that your room in the ticket office will always be waitin' fer you. *(He takes her up to window, up center left.)* Come here a minute. See that camp fire over there? That's the temporary home of the worst hombre in these parts. He's aimin' to move in here to-morrow before breakfast. *(CAROLINE moves a step towards SONNY, at the thought.)* If he gits his wish, there won't be another candle on my birthday cake. But

if I git mine, and I find that he has tore up a solitary stick of my ranch on the corner of Broadway and Eighth, I'm going to spank him so hard that his teeth'll rattle.

CAROLINE.

And when you get tired, you can turn him over to me.

(There is a hoarse, inarticulate muttering from the divan where SONNY lies. She gives a strangled scream and struggles to a sitting posture, her hands at her throat, her eyes fixed in a terrified stare. She is half awake and half under the influence of her nightmare.)

SONNY.

(Gasping.)

Bud!

CAROLINE.

(Running to her.)

My dear!

BUD runs in from down right, followed by McCORD and HELM. He crosses to SONNY and sits on divan, holding her close.

BUD.

Sonny! Sonny lamb!

SONNY.

(Chokingly.)

Bud, don't let him kill her!

BUD.

It's only the nightmare, baby! Wake up! Bud's right here by you.

SONNY.

She—she—

BUD.

I won't let him hurt you, sweetheart.

SONNY.

Not me—my mother! My poor little mother!

TUCKER.

(Shouting in alarm and surprise.)

Son!

SONNY.

(Brought to her senses but still dazed.)

Oh!

(McCord, seating himself in armchair up right, and HELM, sitting back of table at center left, are interested onlookers during this scene.)

BUD.

(Tenderly wiping her forehead with his handkerchief.)

My pore little girl!

SONNY.

(Leaning wearily against him.)

It never was so real before, and yet it was different. It's always been me he was after. This time, it was mother. This time he didn't touch me only when he threw me away from her. I was holding onto her skirt; he was drunk. He took her by the throat. Nobody was there to help her— *(Breaks off and sobs weakly.)*

BUD.

Honey, listen to me a minute. We're goin' to put

an end to this ol' dream, if we can, but we got to talk a little about it first. Try to remember all of it, just this once, no matter how it hurts you, and then we'll never speak about it again. You say it was your mother?

SONNY.

Yes!

BUD.

How did you know that?

SONNY.

Because I loved her, and she loved me.

BUD.

What did she look like?

SONNY.

(Making an effort to control herself.)

She had light hair, almost yellow, and brown eyes. They were so sad—like she was tired—I—I can't—
(She breaks down.)

BUD.

Go on, honey. It'll soon be over for good.

SONNY.

She was wearing a blue dress. It was faded, and there was a black breastpin at the neck. Her chin would touch it every time she looked down at me. She would look at me and then out of the window and hold me tight. She was afraid—

BUD.

(Prompting her as she stops, shivering.)
Of what?

SONNY.

Of him!

BUD.

(Exchanging worried glances with TUCKER.)
Who was he?

SONNY.

(Concentrating with all her might in an effort to remember.)

I almost remembered, just as you spoke, but now it's gone.

BUD.

(Relieved.)

Never mind! What else?

SONNY.

She saw him coming, and she just sort of choked 'way down in her throat and stood still—terribly still. I did, too. I couldn't move. He came right in as if he belonged there and sat down and drank out of a bottle he had with him. He spoke to my mother, and she didn't answer. He swore at her. She never moved. After a while, he walked over to her, and he—he hit my hand loose from her skirt, and then she screamed, and when she screamed, he said something under his breath and hooked his fingers like claws and got her by the throat— *(She leaps to her feet, gasping.)* It was that man out there! *(Points toward window as she clings desperately to BUD, who is thoroughly alarmed and questions TUCKER helplessly with his eyes.)*

BUD.

It can't be, Son!

SONNY.

It is El Malo! I know! I know who it is now. His face is engraved on my memory!

BUD.

(*Sternly.*)

Son, that's impossible. The man who choked your mother is dead.

SONNY.

(*Hysterically.*)

No, he's not! He didn't die. He's alive. (*A sudden realization strikes her, and she looks at BUD with wild eyes.*) Then it wasn't a dream!

BUD.

(*Hesitating.*)

No!

SONNY.

It all really happened just as I saw it now? It was my mother he was after, and he killed her! He killed her when I was a little girl.

BUD.

Yes.

SONNY.

Why didn't you tell me that, Bud?

BUD.

I couldn't, honey.

SONNY.

Was that fair?

TUCKER.

(*After a pause.*)

We thought it best not to, Son—him and me both.

SONNY.

(*Accusingly.*)

And you knew it, too, Ping?

TUCKER.

Yeh; I knew it.

SONNY.

And—and you didn't tell me?

BUD.

We acted fer your own good, Son.

SONNY.

For my good! You've let me go on fighting in the dark, day after day, year after year, trying to understand and to keep sane through it all, when just telling me would have saved me from that. Is it my fault I'm a coward?

BUD.

(*Agonized.*)

Don't, honey, please!

TUCKER.

Mebbe we was wrong not to tell you. I wonder.

BUD.

I'm sorry, Son. I'm as sorry as I can be. I reckon you know that, but it's too late to do anything about it now.

SONNY.

(*Facing about determinedly.*)

No; it's not.

BUD.

What do you want me to do?

SONNY.

(Crosses to him, takes TUCKER's gun from the table, and offers it to BUD.)

That man is still alive. (BUD, at left, looks at gun, then at SONNY, drops his eyes, and goes past her to TUCKER, at center, appealing to him.) Bud?

(BUD, at center left, turns slightly back toward SONNY. TUCKER speaks quickly in fear that BUD may take the gun.)

TUCKER.

(Quickly.)

Don't give him that gun. He don't dare take it. He's afraid to.

SONNY.

Afraid! Only women are afraid. Men aren't—not the real ones, and Bud never could be. *(She holds out the gun.)* Take it, Bud!

BUD.

I can't.

SONNY.

(Quietly and deliberately.)

You have killed everything in me that ever respected or loved or believed in anybody, you coward! *(Exit, down left. CAROLINE starts to follow her.)*

TUCKER.

Carrie!

(CAROLINE stops at left.)

HELM.

(Under his breath.)

By Jove!

TUCKER.

(*With his hand on BUD's shoulder.*)

You infernal, soft-hearted young idiot!

McCord.

Don't rub it in, for God's sake! When a man is down, let him have half a chance to get up again.

TUCKER.

(*Angrily.*)

He ain't down! You don't know anything about it. (*Sits at right of table.*)

CAROLINE.

What shall I do?

TUCKER.

Leave her alone. She'll be all right.

HELM.

I shan't forget this night soon.

McCord.

(*Resentfully.*)

I hope you have kept your little notebook handy. You've had material enough for a dozen novels.

HELM.

(*Largely.*)

Yes. I dare say I have. It's not exactly original, though.

McCord.

(*Rising and crossing to BUD at center.*)

Williams, I'm sorry we had to stick around in the way like this. You've got troubles enough of your own, without having to put up with us, but we're here and we can't help ourselves. Will you count on me

for—well—anything and everything? I'm a fairly good shot.

BUD.

(Not looking up.)

Yeh; I will. Thanks!

HELM.

(Rising and crossing to BUD as McCORD turns up center.)

I know there's nothing that I can do. I had intended—

BUD.

(As before.)

Thanks!

McCORD.

(Up center right, angrily to HELM.)

Hey! Come finish your beauty sleep.

BUD.

(Frantically as he crosses to door, down right.)

I can't stand this.

TUCKER.

(At center left.)

Come back, Bud. She's better off by herself, and she'll forget what she said in less than an hour.

BUD.

I can't bear to have her suffer this way.

TUCKER.

Leave her alone. Carrie'll go in after a while and see how she is. It'll do her good to have a nice female cry.

BUD.

(At left.)

My pore tired little girl!

McCord.

(Surprised, at center right.)

You forgive very easily.

BUD.

Fergive what?

McCord.

(Crosses to center.)

What she said to you just now. If she had said it to me, I wouldn't be inclined to overlook it in a hurry. Why didn't you take her gun when she offered it to you? That's what drove her out of her head.

TUCKER.

(Seated at center left, grimly.)

He wouldn't of took it becuz I wouldn't of let him.

HELM.

(Crosses to center, disposed to take the whole thing lightly.)

You wouldn't?

TUCKER.

(Rising and speaking slowly and ominously.)

Yeh! That's what I said, and I know what I'm talkin' about.

HELM.

(Crossing to him, amiably.)

It would be very interesting to me as a writer to

get at a few primary facts. If our friend here is not a coward, why should he be afraid of a gun?

TUCKER.

(At center left.)

Becuz he shot and killed a man when he was a kid; that's why. And he's under a twenty-year parole sentence not to touch a gun under no circumstances. That's why! And Sonny's father was the man that he killed, and he dassn't let a chirp out of him about it, or she'd never look at him again. That's why! Now what other primary fact do you want me to throw and brand fer you?

HELM.

(Startled.)

Indeed?

McCord.

(Going a step to TUCKER as HELM goes up center.)

Then Williams got there—?

TUCKER.

Just too late to save the mother. Poor kid! You was only sixteen then; wasn't you, Bud?

BUD.

(Muttering, at left.)

I reckon so. I wasn't too late to git him.

TUCKER.

(Kindly crosses to BUD and lays a hand on his shoulder.)

Take it easy, old son. Take it easy!

BUD.

I'm just goin' in to see if she's all right, Ping. I

won't talk to her. I won't say nothin'. (*Exit, down left.*)

TUCKER.

(*After an awkward pause, picking up his gun.*)

Gladys, you shore have developed some troublesome, cantankerous nature in your old age.

Enter BUD, down left, in dismay.

BUD.

She's gone! (*General exclamations.*) Her dress is layin' on the floor in a heap, an' her ridin' clothes that I got out fer her, they're gone, too, and her window's open.

TUCKER.

(*At center left.*)

My God! She's makin' fer him!

McCord.

(*At center right.*)

Who?

TUCKER.

El Malo! (*To BUD.*) She's got it into her pore little head that he's the party who killed her mother, and seein' that neither you ner me would go git him, she's hit the trail fer town to meet up with him her own self!

BUD.

(*Crossing to TUCKER.*)

Give me that gun!

TUCKER.

No, Bud. It's my place to see this thing through.

It's your place to stay here and protect the house and Carrie. I'll grab a hoss and head Sonny off by takin' a straight cut. Do you reckon he'll come through Calico?

BUD.

(At center left.)

He's got to if he's headed this way.

TUCKER.

(As he takes hat from peg, down right.)

Likely he'll stop and try to stick up the hotel. I'll wait fer him there.

CAROLINE.

(As he starts to go, crosses to center.)

Good luck!

TUCKER.

(Turning at door.)

Thanks, Carrie. I'll need it. *(Exit, down right.)*

BUD.

(Crossing to center right, dazed.)

God A'mighty, what'll I do? What kin I do?

CAROLINE.

(Crossing to him.)

If you're staying here on my account, don't do it.

BUD.

I can't go and leave you here.

CAROLINE.

What's to hinder me from going with you?

BUD.

(Joyfully.)

Lord love you! Come on!

(*As they bolt for door down right, a volley of shots is heard off right. HELM and McCORD run to windows. BUD snatches his hat from peg, down right.*)

McCORD.

(*At window, up center left.*)

He made it! They're following him, though.
There he goes! Good boy! Good boy!

BUD.

(*Grimly.*)

Did you hear that?

CAROLINE.

I heard. We are not going to be too late; are we?

BUD.

No'm; we ain't!

(*Exeunt BUD and CAROLINE, up center, turning left.*)

CURTAIN

SONNY

THIRD ACT

SCENE: *Office of the Grand Commercial Hotel in Calico, on the Mexican border. It has three doors: double doors up center, the main entrance from outdoors; a door up left, leading to the rear of the hotel; and a third door a little below the center of the right wall, leading to the back yard. The exterior backing for the doors up center shows a row of little wooden buildings typical of the main street in a very small western town. Two windows, with well worn shades, are in the back drop, being respectively at right and left of the double doors, the upper part of which are of smoked glass, with the name of the hotel printed on the glass backwards. The room is roughly finished and plainly furnished. Along the left wall in a kind of alcove extending from the left door down to the footlights, is a long hotel desk, facing right. The door up left is flush with the front of the desk. Hanging on the wall back of the desk is a Santa Fé railroad map, and fastened to the wall at the up-stage end of the desk is a series of pigeonholes, in several of which are a few letters and some hotel keys. Under the window up left is a bench, and to the left of it on the wall is a wooden strip in which are fastened a few pegs for hanging wraps. In the upper right-hand corner, are two small, low tables, around each of which are four plain kitchen chairs. Two more kitchen chairs are placed*

around the right wall and back drop up right. A little up stage from the right door is a small stove. At center right, in line with the right door, is a third table, at right and left of which respectively are two more kitchen chairs. A wide faded chalk line is drawn from the center doors well down the center of the stage, to indicate the boundary line between the right side of the room, which is in Mexico, and the left side, which is in California. A soiled Mexican flag is draped around the picture of some Mexican dignitary on the wall above the window up center right, and an American flag, less soiled, is draped around a picture of Lincoln above the window up center left. On the desk is a hotel register, with pen, ink, and other writing paraphernalia, also an unlighted kerosene lamp, wired for electricity. Over the letter rack hangs a clock so small that its face cannot be read by the audience. A large kerosene lamp, with a tin reflector, hangs on the wall just left of the center doors. The walls of the room are hung with pictures from the Police Gazette and appropriate advertisements. Several men's hats are on the bench up left; another hat lies on the table at center right. Hidden in the stove is a bottle presumably containing brandy. It is just before dawn the following morning, and the stage is dark except for a faint bluish light coming from off stage through the windows and the glass part of the doors up center.

At rise of curtain, the stage appears to be unoccupied, but TUCKER is crouching down under the hotel desk, well hidden from the audience. As the curtain goes up, a horse's hoofs are heard approaching in slow, lagging fashion from off right. The unseen rider dismounts, walks a few steps along the board

walk off center, and appears at the window up center right. It is EL MALO. He surveys the room furtively and then knocks at the door up center. There is no answer. He repeats the knock rather timidly. The door up left opens and FRANCELIA enters. She goes to the window up left and tries to see who is at the door. EL MALO knocks again, and she goes up center and calls through the closed door.

FRANCELIA.

W'at you want here?

EL MALO.

(In a pleading voice, from off center right.)

A room and a bath.

FRANCELIA.

Oh!

She unlocks the door, and EL MALO enters and comes down center painfully, exhausted. FRANCELIA lights lamp on desk, and points to the register.

FRANCELIA.

Here's the book!

EL MALO.

(Crossly, going to center left.)

I don't want to read.

FRANCELIA.

You can write your name down; can't you? And where you leeve?

EL MALO.

(Writing laboriously.)

I live here.

FRANCELIA.

I have not see' you here before.

EL MALO.

Yes; you have, only you don't remember me. You was a little tyke.

FRANCELIA.

I grow up beeg now.

EL MALO.

Well, well, ain't time funny?

FRANCELIA.

What kind of a room you'd like, Meester—Mees-ter—? (*She consults register.*) Chree-sty?

EL MALO.

One with a bed in it.

FRANCELIA.

You any relation to little Mees Chreesty?

EL MALO.

I'm her paw!

FRANCELIA.

(*Going closer to him and staring at him.*)
I've always heard folks say you are dead.

EL MALO.

You kin argue with them from now on.

FRANCELIA.

I can get you one drink if you want it. The real stuff. Some they have before the war. (EL MALO *heaves heavily and crosses to left.*) Don't you drink?

EL MALO.

(Turns at corner of desk.)

Girl, you're touchin' on a mighty tender chord, because I love liquor with the noblest, purest sentiments a man ever had. I devoted a hull life to it, and two weeks ago it turned on me somethin' cruel—bit the hand it fed on. It tied me up with rheumatiz on'til I couldn't set me hoss, and it left me high and dry without no courage ner backbone. I couldn't carry on my business without it, so I come home.

FRANCELIA.

W'at is your beesiness?

EL MALO.

We'll take that up to-morrow. Where's my room?

FRANCELIA.

(Starts up left.)

Si, señor.

EL MALO.

(Stops her.)

And don't let anybody disturb me. I don't feel like talkin'. *(Starts up left.)*

(TUCKER rises from behind the desk and takes hold of his arm.)

TUCKER.

You don't, eh?

EL MALO.

(As they face each other across desk.)

Put on them lights.

TUCKER.

Get out, Francelia, and make it snappy. I got

some business with this here dod-gasted lyin' ghost that says he's alive when he ain't.

(Exit FRANCELIA, up left.)

EL MALO.

(In a rather feeble, squeaky voice.)

Hullo, Ping!

TUCKER.

Are you with him?

EL MALO.

Am I with who?

TUCKER.

This guerilla El Malo.

EL MALO.

(Smiling conceitedly.)

I'm him.

TUCKER.

(Dazed.)

You're him?

EL MALO.

Yeh!

TUCKER.

What are you doin' here?

EL MALO.

I've come home.

TUCKER.

What do you mean, home? You ain't got no more home than a jack rabbit.

EL MALO.

Ain't I? I got my ranch, and to-morrow I'm goin' to settle down there in peace and quiet till the end of my days. I've come home fer good. (TUCKER *tries to speak but makes only a gasping sound.*) I'm quittin' a glowin' career to do it. I've built up as pretty a reputation fer high-class outlawin' as they is anywheres, but they ain't nothin' to fame when you're gittin' old and tired. I be'n a good outlaw, and now I'm goin' to join the church and be a good citizen.

TUCKER.

(*Roaring with astonishment.*)

What!

EL MALO.

(*Backing to center, offended.*)

Don't yell at me that away, Ping. 'That ain't pretty.

TUCKER.

(*Following him.*)

Look here, Christy! I want you to tell a few things, and tell 'em quick. Where you be'n all these years? How do you come to be El Malo, and if so, why?

EL MALO.

(*Crossing to chair at center right.*)

It's a long story.

TUCKER.

Start it backward. I got to streak back to the ranch and keep your fellow artists from jumpin' it.

EL MALO.

(Laughing as he sits at center right.)

The boys? They wouldn't hurt you ner the ranch, either.

TUCKER.

(At center.)

There's a hundred of 'em out there settin' on their haunches like they was wolves.

EL MALO.

They're just waitin' fer the party.

TUCKER.

Party?

EL MALO.

I promised to open a bar'l of whisky and give 'em a farewell celebration. They're "just seein' Nellie home."

TUCKER.

But they fired on us!

FRANCELIA *enters, up left, quietly and goes behind desk.*

EL MALO.

Only from a festive point of view. They ain't got a single cartridge that's loaded.

TUCKER.

(Sees FRANCELIA.)

FranceLIA, bring me a brandy. *(Crosses to center left.)*

FRANCELIA.

You'll have to sit over there if you're going to

drink. That side of the room is in Mexico. (*She points to table at right.*)

EL MALO.

Yeh. Leave us set a spell and talk. Come on over, Ping. (*TUCKER crosses and sits right of table.*)

FRANCELIA.

(*Crosses to center.*)

One brandy. What else?

EL MALO.

Lemon soda.

TUCKER.

(*Freshly astonished.*)

What!

EL MALO.

I don't drink no more.

TUCKER.

Bring me two brandies. I sure do need some shock absorbers. (*FRANCELIA goes out, up left.*) So you don't drink no more?

EL MALO.

I can't. It'd kill me if I did.

TUCKER.

Fer as I know, you already be'n dead once. The last time I looked down on you—that was seventeen years ago—you was full of holes and terrible discouraged.

EL MALO.

I could still crawl. Nobody missed me, with the kid havin' a fit. I must of made the arroyo, and

from then on I don't remember much till a month later when I woke up in a camp of bad hombres across the border.

TUCKER.

I reckon you know that Bud went up fer twenty years fer killin' you. We found a body in the arroyo later on and thought it was you.

EL MALO.

Bud still servin' time?

FRANCELIA *enters, up left, with soda and two empty whisky glasses, crossing to right.*

TUCKER.

In a way; he's on parole for twenty years never to touch a gun.

(FRANCELIA *puts soda and glasses on table, opens stove, takes out bottle of brandy which she puts before TUCKER, who pours two brandies. EL MALO leans toward TUCKER with his glass. TUCKER draws back.*)

EL MALO.

(*Complainingly.*)

What's the matter? What did I ever do to you, Ping?

TUCKER.

You killed a woman that I loved like a sister.

(FRANCELIA, *hearing this, leaves abruptly, up left.*)

EL MALO.

(*Surprised.*)

Shucks, did she die? (*He drinks thoughtfully,*

alone.) Anyhow, what's a woman or two between good pals? I never had much use for them. Always naggin' a man half crazy. Got to wipe your boots and everything. I wouldn't of gone fer her, only she deceived me. (TUCKER *looks at him sternly.*) She promised me a boy! What did I want with another female? One was more'n I cud bear. Here I was callin' it Jack and Sonny before it ever walked into the house, and when it opened it's mouth and let out a soprano yell, Lord, I was just sick! That was when I took to drinkin' (TUCKER *glares at him again*)—harder. And the harder I drunk, the more brave deeds I done. That's how I come to get this here name of El Malo. The boys was crazy over me. They looked up to me so that I didn't dare to get sober. Then of a sudden, liquor turned on me—turned on me ungrateful. So I says to myself, "Why not quit and go home? It's peaceful and quiet there, and you're gittin' old. Why not?" says I, and I done it.

(TUCKER *rises, looks searchingly at EL MALO and crosses to center, gives him another look and thoughtfully crosses up to door, center, and then back to chair, where he sits exactly as before. EL MALO watches him intently, turning his chair and never letting TUCKER get behind him.*)

TUCKER.

Darned if I know what to do with you, Christy.

EL MALO.

I always was a favorite here. Folks'll be glad to see me again.

TUCKER.

(Quietly and ominously.)

Look here, Christy. Folks ain't goin' to see you again.

EL MALO.

(Pleasantly but craftily.)

Ain't they? What'll stop 'em?

TUCKER.

You can't come back.

EL MALO.

I am back.

TUCKER.

You're back for the night, but before mornin' you're goin' to head south and stay south.

EL MALO.

Who says so?

TUCKER.

(Sternly.)

The law!

EL MALO.

The law can't touch me, Ping. What I done acrost the border don't count here. I'm known as John Christy here. How are you or the law either goin' to prove that I was this El Malo party?

TUCKER.

What about that chokin' affair?

EL MALO.

I was out of my mind then and ever since. I wouldn't of stayed away so long if I wasn't; would I?

TUCKER.

Why, you dad-blasted ol' hypocrite! You'd be lynched to-morrow if I was to tell what I know about you.

EL MALO.

But you won't—fer the kid's sake. (TUCKER *wilts*. EL MALO *sips his soda*.) They's a lot of things you think you could do, but you can't do any of them. You see you ain't smart like me at figgerin' things out. When it comes right down to cases, you ain't smart at all. You've knowed me fer twenty years and you don't even know my name.

TUCKER.

Ain't Christy your real brand?

EL MALO.

John Christy is my first two names. I got a third one up my sleeve.

TUCKER.

(*Solemnly.*)

You do beat hell.

EL MALO.

(*Modestly.*)

Don't I?

TUCKER.

(*Sighing, rises and crosses to center.*)

Well, I might as well go on home, I reckon (*turns at center*)—since you mentioned Sonny's name. I—I was hopin' against hope that I could persuade you away from the ranch fer her sake. I don't know how you and her is goin' to git along together.

EL MALO.

(*Indulgently.*)

I may grow to like her in time.

TUCKER.

When I left the house, she was on her way down here.

EL MALO.

(*Irritably.*)

Ain't that like a female? I'm too tired to bounce her up and down on my knee. I won't do it.

TUCKER.

(*Sternly.*)

When your poor little girl gits here— (*He breaks off to listen. A horse is heard approaching at a gallop.*) Bennett's got here from Viega City!

EL MALO.

(*Sharply, rising.*)

Who's Bennett?

TUCKER.

The marshal!

EL MALO.

(*Rattled.*)

I'm all right. He can't touch me.

TUCKER.

(*Grinning maliciously.*)

Why not? Who's to keep him? I ain't. You wouldn't listen to me.

EL MALO.

My name's on the register there.

TUCKER.

(Turns quickly, tears leaf from register, and puts it in his pocket.)

Tell that to Bennett. He ain't seen you before.

EL MALO.

(Frightened, stopping him as he crosses to door, down right.)

Ping! You ain't goin' to fail your ol' pal, Jack Christy?

TUCKER.

(Pushing him aside and crossing to door down right.)

He's dead. *(Turns at door.)* And that wasn't his real name, anyway. *(Exit, down right.)*

The horse is heard to stop off left. The rider dismounts and approaches. EL MALO hesitates between escape and standing his ground. He makes sure his gun is in place, shakes himself stubbornly and sits again, picking up newspaper and pretending to be engrossed in it. SONNY passes the window up center left quickly, and enters at center like a bolt of thunder. Once in the room, she becomes cautious, however, and crosses down left, drawing her gun and watching the figure at the table like a hawk. There is a strained silence, EL MALO watching her from the corner of his eye.

EL MALO.

(Looking up and smiling.)

Real nice weather, ain't it?

SONNY.

(Ominously, covering him.)

I am Jack Christy. I reckon you've heard that name before. It was my father's name, and he was the bravest man in California.

EL MALO.

(Rising.)

As names go, it has a terrible pleasin' sound. I recollect years ago—

SONNY.

You recollect chokin' a woman by that name?

EL MALO.

We ain't goin' to speak of that now. I—er—I reckon I'll be goin'. *(Looks around for his hat.)*

SONNY.

I reckon you will. You got a horse to ride?

EL MALO.

I got my white hoss. You comin', too?

SONNY.

What do you think I'm here for but to git you? And don't make me no trouble. We got a long ride ahead of us.

EL MALO.

(Bewildered.)

It ain't but two miles to the ranch.

SONNY.

It's twenty to Viega City.

EL MALO.

(*Alarmed.*)

Who says we're goin' there?

SONNY.

I said so. I don't trust this jail here.

EL MALO.

Jail!

SONNY.

(*Grimly.*)

Only for the time bein'. Then San Quentin and a rope fer you, you murderer!

EL MALO.

(*Terrified.*)

You can't do that! It's genuine bloodthirsty.

SONNY.

Yeh? You ought to be used to that.

EL MALO.

But fer you to do it! I tell you it ain't human. It's ag'in' all the laws of nature.

SONNY.

What does a bad man care about laws? You don't. You've smashed enough of them not to care. You don't stop to think about a little thing like a law.

EL MALO.

But fer a child to turn ag'in' her own kind!

SONNY.

That's a-plenty from you.

EL MALO.

I admit I ain't be'n altogether a good one.

SONNY.

Good what? Outlaw?

EL MALO.

A good father.

SONNY.

(Jeeringly.)

You! Are you goin' to tell me that you got a family some place—a wife and a houseful of kids—so that I'll let you off easy? Not on your life. *(Laughs loudly.)* That's pretty good—that is!

EL MALO.

(Sharply.)

You got a mighty convenient memory.

SONNY.

(Also sharply.)

You bet I have! I won't ferget you in a hurry.

EL MALO.

(Losing his temper.)

Reckon you already have. Look a little closer.

SONNY.

I'm as close as I want to be to a thing like you.

EL MALO.

(Shouting.)

Who the hell do you think I am?

SONNY.

Who the hell gives a damn who you are?

EL MALO.

(Turning away to sit right of table.)

Looks like we ain't goin' to git along very well. *(His hand comes in contact with glass of brandy. Unconsciously he drinks it. He is startled at first, then reassured.)* Kinda thought we would somehow. Seems like you orter show me more respect than you do.

SONNY.

(At center right.)

Respect!

EL MALO.

(Taking another drink.)

I reckon the game's about up if you're goin' to turn on me.

SONNY.

(Fiercely, across the table.)

I ain't only goin' to turn on you, but I'm goin' to git you. Nobody else'll do it for me so I'm goin' to do it. You killed my little mother, and made me a whinin', whimperin' wreck all the years of my life until to-night, when somethin' snapped and I quit bein' afraid. I won't ever be afraid again. I won't ever be a woman again, either, because you've got to have a heart to be a woman, and I ain't got none. I'm nothin' but a fixed idea—that's all I am. And that fixed idea is to settle you and pay off her score and mine—and Bud's.

EL MALO.

(Beginning to feel the drinks.)

It'll be all right when I see Bud. I kin straighten it out with him. *(Takes another drink.)*

SONNY.

You keep away from Bud! I've hurt him enough without anything extra from you or anybody else.

EL MALO.

(*Whining.*)

I'm the one to be sore—not him. He wasn't in long. (SONNY *looks at him, startled.*) Ping says he got out right away. If he'd of served his whole twenty years, he'd of had a reason to be sore at me, but he ain't got a reason now. (SONNY *turns her face away, so that he cannot observe her agitation.* EL MALO *drinks again and continues.*) I don't see how they could of let him off so easy after killin' a man. It wasn't his fault that I didn't turn up my toes. I had enough holes in me to be a sieve. You remember that.

SONNY.

(*Chokingly.*)

No!

EL MALO.

Well, I don't remember much myself after Bud come in the door with that gun in his hand. (SONNY *returns her gun to its holster and sits suddenly and limply in chair at left of table at center right.*) He won't carry another one again, soon though. They paroled him account of his being a minor, but they'd slap him back in jail so quick it'd make his head swim if they ever ketched him with a gun on his hip. So I ain't afraid of him. (SONNY *buries her head in her arms on the table and sobs convulsively, all her bravado gone.*) Shucks! Just like her ma. You mustn't, Son. That ain't pretty. (*As she continues*

to sob, he rises and reaches out an awkward hand as if to pat her shoulder, thinks better of it, and scratches his head in embarrassment.) What do you want to go cuttin' up like this fer? Here we was gittin' right down to brass tacks, when you start pawin' the ground and bellerin' at the top of your lungs. One minute you take after me and the next minute after your ma. You'd orter settle on one of us and behave accordin'.

SONNY.

(Lifts her head slowly.)

Wh—what?

EL MALO.

If you're goin' to be your ma's gal, so so. Or if you'd ruther be like me, why act that-a-way, Sonny.

SONNY.

(Rising.)

Who—who are you?

EL MALO.

I'm your pa.

SONNY.

My father was the bravest man in California.

EL MALO.

Sure! Who told you?

SONNY.

Bud. He's always told me that since I was a baby.

EL MALO.

That was right nice of Bud.

SONNY.

What did you mean by saying that to me? (*She seizes him by both arms and looks searchingly into his face just as—*)

BUD *bursts into the room, up center, coming from right, followed by* CAROLINE.

BUD.

(*Coming down center.*)

Git away from her! If you've laid a finger on that child, I'll break you in two. (*Suddenly recognizes* EL MALO.)

TUCKER *enters, down right, and crosses down center left. CAROLINE crosses to left.*

BUD.

(*To* EL MALO.)

You! You!

TUCKER.

(*At center left, warningly.*)

Bud!

BUD.

Him! Come to life ag'in!

TUCKER.

It's all right. I be'n on the job. Don't you come along and spoil it. What did you bring Carrie fer?

CAROLINE.

He couldn't have kept me away.

BUD.

Son! Come home!

SONNY.

(*Her eyes glued on EL MALO.*)

Wait!

BUD.

It's safe. Them greasers won't hurt a fly, and as fer him, he ain't goin' to bother you no more.

SONNY.

He says he's my father.

BUD.

(*At center right.*)

What?

TUCKER.

(*At center.*)

Why, the dinged ol' liar!

SONNY.

Is he my father, Bud?

TUCKER.

(*Crossing to EL MALO.*)

No, you ain't.

EL MALO.

(*Raging.*)

I'm John Christy! That's who I am.

(CAROLINE looks interested as she begins to recognize something familiar in his voice.)

BUD.

John Christy's dead.

EL MALO.

He ain't dead. I'm him. Ping, tell 'em who I am.

TUCKER.

You're El Malo, a bad hombre from acrost the border.

EL MALO.

(Snarlingly.)

What else?

TUCKER.

And you're loco.

EL MALO.

(Frenzied.)

I ain't loco! I'm as sane as you are. What's my name? Tell 'em my name.

CAROLINE.

(At center left, with a scream of recognition.)

It's Richards! It's Winkie Richards! *(She makes a dive for him. TUCKER stops her.)*

EL MALO.

(Yelling and whipping out his gun.)

You keep away from me, Carrie. *(He backs to the door, down right, and opens it, with his back to it, coming forward the width of the door when it is open. This leaves him directly across the table from BUD, who keeps between the gun and the others.)* I want you all to know before I go that I came north to reform and settle down calm and tranquil, but you won't let me. I needed rest, an' I git a heap o' noise instead. I wanted a home, and I set plumb into a hornet's nest. Bein' good don't git you nowheres, so from now on I'm goin' to be just as bad as I always was, and badder. I'm goin' back to Mexico where I can be an outlaw in peace and quiet and

comfort, and I tell you, one and all, I hope I never see any of you again this side of hell.

(He shoots directly at BUD, who realizes it is coming, lifts a chair at center right, and throws it at him simultaneously. The table knocks the gun from EL MALO's hand, and it falls on the floor under the table. He dashes through the door up center and is gone, turning right. TUCKER puts CAROLINE behind him and reaches for his gun.)

SONNY.

Bud! Are you hurt?

BUD.

No!

TUCKER.

What happened?

BUD.

(Sets the table in place and picks up EL MALO's gun, which he puts in his pocket.)

Nothin'.

SONNY.

He wasn't really my father; was he, Bud?

BUD.

(Quickly, with a look at TUCKER, taking her in his arms.)

No, honey!

TUCKER.

(To CAROLINE.)

So that was Winkie!

CAROLINE.

(Breathing hard.)

The infamous rascal! I knew I should find him some day. I might have guessed he would turn out to be this!

TUCKER.

I'm glad for Sonny's sake that you come along with Bud. She mebbe would of believed the ol' scamp when he sprung her pa's name on her. *(Crosses to SONNY, who is at center right in BUD's arms.)* You ain't goin' to give him another thought; are you, Son? He's gone and gone fer good.

SONNY.

I know he is.

TUCKER.

And you won't think no more about him?

SONNY.

(Looking at BUD.)

No, I won't. Not now.

(BUD puts her in chair at center right and goes to door up center, where he stands looking out. SONNY watches him, her chin quivering.)

TUCKER.

(To CAROLINE.)

Shall we go on back, ma'am?

CAROLINE.

(Groaning.)

I cannot ride another mile on a horse. I'm crippled for life.

TUCKER.

I'll wake up Cal Smith, if he ain't dead already of heart disease, and git us a rig to drive home in.

CAROLINE.

(Hesitating.)

While I'm in town, I would rather like—

TUCKER.

What, Carrie?

CAROLINE.

To see the ranch.

TUCKER.

(Joyfully.)

Right around the corner. We'll take a little spin in the hand car and stop off at the section house fer breakfast. What say? You ain't a-goin' to back out; are you?

CAROLINE.

(Smiling broadly.)

No'm; I ain't. *(They go out, up center, turning right.)*

BUD.

(At right.)

You're all tuckered out; ain't you, Son? *(She nods wearily.)* You too tired even to ride home?

SONNY.

(Seated at center right.)

Yeh! I can't move. I'm just dead.

BUD.

(Sitting beside her.)

Pore kid! You've had a powerful hard night to

put up with, but you come out of it like a major. Like a real little he-feller! I was plumb certain that if you ever got a chance to prove how brave you was you'd do it, and you did. I would admire to know how many other girls would bust up to a ornery lyin' ol' pirate like this here recent gent, and tell him where to git off right to his face. They wouldn't of done it. No, sir! They'd have been skeered pink! But you wasn't.

SONNY.

(*Reviving.*)

I wasn't afraid of him.

BUD.

'Course you wasn't.

SONNY.

The minute I realized that he was real, I wasn't a bit afraid.

BUD.

Then what in tarnation thunder you be'n callin' yourself a coward for? (*She wails suddenly and hides her face on his shoulder, sobbing.*) Sonny! What's the matter?

SONNY.

I'm sorry.

BUD.

What fer?

SONNY.

I called you one.

BUD.

Oh, that! That wasn't nothin'.

SONNY.

(Sitting up and wiping her eyes.)

I didn't know then about—about—

BUD.

About me an' El Malo havin' that little spat years ago?

SONNY.

Why didn't you tell me?

BUD.

I'm kinda modest. I don't talk much about the game I bring down.

SONNY.

(Remorsefully.)

And I thought all the time that you were just afraid of him, instead of being the bravest man on earth—next to my father. *(She snuggles her head on his shoulder.)*

BUD.

(Protesting.)

No'm. I ain't that brave.

SONNY.

You are so. I wish I had a picture of him. I'll bet you even look like him.

BUD.

(Looking toward door down left.)

No—o! Not so much. We wore our hair some different.

SONNY.

Was he taller than you?

BUD.

Almost a foot. And spread out thick in every direction you could name.

SONNY.

I don't remember him, but I love him.

BUD.

That ain't nothin', Son, to what he'd think of you. *(She yawns noisily.)* Hey! Are you goin' to sleep on me?

SONNY.

(Sitting up and stretching.)

Guess I am. I'm not so tired now. I feel sort of rested and happy.

BUD.

Then I reckon we better be hittin' the ol' trail fer home. How about it?

(She nods, with another yawn, and gets to her feet. BUD rises, picks up her hat, which has fallen to the floor, puts it on her head, wipes the tears from her cheek with the handkerchief around her neck, and brushes her off paternally.)

SONNY.

(As he pauses, awkwardly quiet.)

Ready?

BUD.

Yeh—no, not quite. I just want to say first that I—you—we—we're goin' back as if nothin' had happened, but they has somethin' happened besides all this ruckus. You ain't forgot what you said to me about gittin' married, Son?

SONNY.

(Turning away shyly.)

No'm; I ain't.

BUD.

(Earnestly.)

I'm glad you ain't, because I ain't, either, and I ain't ever going to fergit it. I'm yours fer keeps, just like I always been. You know that; don't you? *(She nods timidly.)* Things is apt to go along like they done before, and it's right that they should. I'm patient, and I'll wait. I'll wait till you say the word, honey, if it's fifty years from now. That's all.

(He takes her hand, and they go up to the center door slowly and thoughtfully. They stand in the doorway looking out. It is almost morning and the stage lights gradually begin to go up to simulate daylight.)

SONNY.

(Drawing a deep breath.)

Um! Smell that air!

BUD.

(Doing likewise.)

Great, ain't it?

SONNY.

(Peering off left.)

They've built up the north side quite a lot. What's that red roof out about a mile?

BUD.

That's Jim Hathaway's! He's a minister now.

SONNY.

(Much interested.)

A minister? Jim is?

BUD.

Jim always was a terrible nice boy. That's the new dee-po. *(He points right. SONNY keeps her eyes left.)* Over this way. Yonder.

SONNY.

(Absently.)

Hum? *(She throws a fleeting glance to right, is not interested, and looks left again.)*

BUD.

(Pulling his hat firmly down over his head.)

Well, Sonny, it's broad daylight. We'll be a-settin' out?

SONNY.

(Adjusting her own hat.)

Yeh! He ought to be up by now.

(BUD realizes the significance of her speech, takes her arm, and they exeunt, up center, turning left.)

CURTAIN

The Girl From Out Yonder

BY

MARION SHORT AND PAULINE PHELPS

COMEDY-DRAMA in 4 acts; 6 men, 4 women. Time, 2¼ hours. **Scenes:** 1 interior, 2 exteriors.

CHARACTERS

(As they appear in the play)

Mrs. Elmer.....A New York society matron
Clarice Stapleton.....A debutante
Edward Elmer.....Mrs. Elmer's nephew
J. Hubert Hughes.....Elmer's friend
Flotsam.....The girl from out yonder
Joey Clarke.....A young fisherman
Captain Amos Barton.....Flotsam's father
Ben Cooke.....The Captain's crony
Cousin Simonson.....The Captain's housekeeper
Stevens.....A waiter at Terry's Harbor Inn

(NOTE.—The rôle of the sheriff, which is not a speaking part, may be assumed by a stage hand, if no suitable super is available.)

Flotsam, the charming young daughter of the lighthouse keeper, finds herself the object of attention of a party of fashionable New York visitors at the harbor clubhouse. She is particularly singled out by Elmer, the kind young man of the party, with whom she promptly falls in love. Their love affair prospers in spite of the malicious maneuverings of the society girl, who is angling for Elmer herself, and the jealous plottings of the fisher lad who is violently in love with Flotsam. At last the fisher lad, in an upflaring of passion, wrecks the course of true love by revealing the fact that Flotsam's father, the old fishing captain, was the murderer of Elmer's father twenty years previously. The poor old captain, heart-broken with the burden of secret guilt long carried, gives himself up to justice and serves his term, supported by the tender affection and devotion of his daughter, who seems to be permanently alienated from her lover. But in the end, love and loyalty win the day, and a surprising revelation brings the lovers together again. A gripping play, overflowing with heart interest and pathos, tempered with laughter, which has kept many audiences laughing and crying during its long and prosperous run in professional stock. Cast includes two excellent all-comedy characters: an obdurate widow, hard to win; and her persistent fisherman swain.

Professional stage rights reserved and a production fee of fifteen dollars required for every amateur performance. Price, Per Copy, 50c

T. S. Denison & Company, Publishers
623 South Wabash Avenue CHICAGO

Back Seat Drivers

BY

LAURENCE (LARRY) E. JOHNSON

COMEDY in 3 acts; 5 men, 4 women. Time, 2½ hours. **Scene:** 1 interior.

CHARACTERS

(As they appear in the play)

John Wilson.....A young business man
Connie Wilson.....His wife
Peter Simms.....A neighbor, also a business man
Goofie.....Handy man about the neighborhood
Della Moffet.....Connie's friend and neighbor
Cuthbert Moffet...Della's husband, a young business man
Austin Spence.....A smooth customer
Amy Webb-Stephens.....Spence's side partner
Clara Simms.....Peter's wife

With a Broadway production and a successful run in stock to its credit, this gay drama of young married life and back seat financiering makes a strong bid for popularity. Two young wives, Connie and Della, whose besetting sin is to twitch hubby's arm at crucial moments when he drives the family bus and the family apple cart, conceive a bright idea of curing their husbands of investing family funds without wifey's approval. Conspiring with a chance salesman of electric toasters, they form a fake corporation to promote the manufacture and sale of an electrical egg-boiling device and persuade their husbands to invest money in it. And then the fun begins. Enter a lovely young widow, alleged owner of the egg boiler, who keeps the wives on pins and needles by flirting outrageously with their husbands. But the husbands are not as dumb as they look, and by some skillful gum-shoeing, catch the lovely widow in the act of sneaking out of town with a nice little slice of the corporation funds, while tipping off the police to a similar move on the part of her fellow crook, the salesman. Other characters who add to the general hilarity are the cocksure, smart-Aleck business man who insists on buying stock in the fake corporation, also his jealous, henpecking wife. An ideal play for any dramatic club looking for smart lines, swift action, sure-fire rôles, and a hurricane of laughs.

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CHICAGO

LAUGH MAKERS

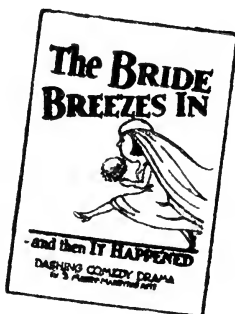
Her Step Husband



Comedy in 3 acts, by LARRY E. JOHNSON; 4 m., 5 w. Time, 2½ hrs. Scene: 1 interior. Mary's gorgeous fibs about her husband's fictitious wealth and her efforts to impress a rich aunt who is visiting them, start a train of misadventures that almost lands hubby in jail. Production fee, fifteen dollars. Price, 50 Cents

The Bride Breezes In

Comedy-drama in 3 acts, by LILLIAN MORTIMER; 5 m., 5 w. Time, 2¼ hrs. Scene: 1 interior. To save his father from ruin, Al consents to a loveless marriage, but weakens when his bride turns out to be a gawky Sis Hopkins. Then the fun begins, and the three masquerading girls add to the hilarity. Production fee, ten dollars. Price, 50 Cents



Welcome to the Old Town

Comedy in 3 acts, by EDWIN SCHIENER; 5 m., 3 w. Time, 2½ hrs. Scene: 1 interior. Con Connover, who had previously left town under a cloud, returns to dress down the village Shylock, save the girl he loves, clear his own name, and put the old town on its feet. Production fee, ten dollars. Price, 50 Cents

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Denison Royalty Plays

—have been carefully selected for their high degree of dramatic strength and their practicable acting qualities. The majority of them have been specially written for amateurs by experienced playwrights with professional successes to their credit. The plays have been edited with unusual care, particularly as to stage directions, which are so complete, clearly expressed, and easily understood that they almost direct themselves. Above all, the Denison royalty plays have the swift movement, the humor, and the emotional qualities that appeal strongly to young players and grip the attention of audiences throughout an evening's entertainment.



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